

Attachment Under Separate Cover

Ordinary Council Meeting – 27 April 2026

South Coast Future Ready Strategy Engagement Report

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Community Engagement Summary

South Coast Future Ready Strategy



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Executive Summary

This report summarises the first phase of community engagement undertaken to inform the South Coast Future Ready Strategy. Engagement was conducted between 19 January and 19 March 2026 and included a broad community survey (415 responses), an Old Scholar Survey (116 responses), a School Students Forum (71 attendees), and informal listening posts held across the community. The findings provide a strong, place-based view of what respondents value about Victor Harbor and the South Coast, the pressures they are experiencing, and the priorities they expect Council and partners to address to support long-term sustainability and liveability.

Overall, the engagement confirms that Victor Harbor and the South Coast are highly valued as places to live. Respondents consistently highlighted the region's natural environment and coastline, relaxed lifestyle and pace of life, strong community spirit, and a sense of safety, connection, and belonging. These strengths are seen as defining features that should be protected as the region grows and changes.

At the same time, the engagement identifies clear and increasing concerns about the region's ability to sustain a balanced and resilient community. Housing emerged as the most significant issue across all engagement streams, with strong concern about affordability, rental availability, housing diversity, and the impacts of these pressures on workers, families, and younger people. Education, training, and career pathways also featured strongly. Many respondents reported that they, or someone in their household, had to leave the region to pursue study or work opportunities, reflecting limited local course options, constrained career progression, and wages often perceived as stronger elsewhere. Transport and connectivity were consistently raised as major constraints on access to jobs, education, services, and social connection, with survey results indicating this is the clearest area of dissatisfaction. Respondents also identified pressure on core services (particularly health), and a lack of evening, social, and youth-focused opportunities as barriers to retaining and attracting working-age households.

Across all engagement methods, there was a clear expectation that Council should play an active leadership role, through planning, advocacy, partnerships, and facilitation, to influence outcomes that are not within Council's direct control. The findings indicate strong support for a strategic response that protects what people value most about the region while addressing the structural pressures that may otherwise undermine long-term liveability, workforce sustainability, and service capacity. In particular, the engagement supports a focused Strategy that treats housing, transport, education/workforce pathways, service capacity, and community vibrancy as interconnected priorities requiring coordinated action.

Key findings from the engagement include:

- o **We love where we live**

A strong message across all engagement was deep pride and attachment to Victor Harbor and the South Coast. Respondents told us they value:

- The natural environment and coastline
- The relaxed lifestyle and pace of life
- Feeling safe, known and connected
- Strong community spirit and belonging.

Most respondents described the region as a great place to live and one they want to protect as it grows and changes.



○ **Housing is the biggest pressure**

Housing was the number one issue raised, across all age groups and engagement activities. We heard that:

- Housing is becoming too expensive for many people
- Rental homes are hard to find
- There are not enough housing options for different life stages, including young people, workers, families and older residents wanting to downsize

Many respondents also linked housing to other challenges, including workforce shortages, difficulty attracting staff, young people leaving the region, and pressure on local services.

There was strong support for Council playing an active leadership role, working with partners to influence better housing outcomes.

○ **Young people often leave because opportunities are limited**

Many respondents, especially young people and former students, said they or someone they know had to leave the region to study, train or find career opportunities. Importantly, in most cases this wasn't because they didn't like living here.

We heard that:

- Leaving often feels unavoidable after school
- Education and training options are limited locally
- Career pathways and progression can be hard to find
- People are more likely to return later in life if housing and jobs are available

There was strong support for building better local education, training and career pathways, including growing Victor Harbor's role as an education hub.

○ **Services and community needs are under growing strain**

While respondents indicated they valued the lifestyle and sense of community in the region, many said everyday services are not keeping pace with change.

Respondents told us that:

- Health services, education and job opportunities often only meet needs adequately – or not well at all
- Access to services can be difficult without a car
- Growing demand is putting pressure on local services

Health care, education, employment opportunities and transport were frequently raised together, showing that services don't exist in isolation.

We heard that:

- Better access to services is essential for liveability
 - Service availability affects whether people can stay, return, or settle locally
 - Planning for future growth must include consideration of service provision, not just housing or infrastructure
- 

o **Liveability is a strength – but it needs care**

While Victor Harbor and the South Coast are seen as very liveable, many respondents said this can't be taken for granted.

Respondents highlighted:

- Limited evening and after-hours activities
- Limited youth-focused spaces and things to do
- A desire for more cultural, social and community events

Respondents said a more vibrant, inclusive community life would help attract and retain younger people, support local businesses, and strengthen connection for everyone.

o **Belonging is strong, but not equal for everyone**

Most respondents said they feel a strong sense of belonging, especially through:

- Friends and neighbours
- Community events
- Sport, volunteering and local groups

However, some people said it can be hard to get involved due to:

- Time pressures
- Transport challenges
- Limited evening activities
- Not knowing how to connect or take part

There was interest in clearer pathways to participation, leadership and involvement (especially for young people and working families).

The engagement process was designed to ensure the community's voice is central to shaping the South Coast Future Ready Strategy. By gathering input on barriers, opportunities and aspirations, the consultation has provided valuable insights. This feedback will inform the development of targeted actions to address key issues such as access, inclusion and pathways for involvement, particularly for younger residents and working families.

Next steps will involve incorporating these community priorities into a draft Strategy, with further opportunities for public input as the process progresses. Council will continue to work closely with stakeholders to refine proposed initiatives, ensuring they are practical, inclusive and responsive to the needs of Victor Harbor's diverse population. Ultimately, the aim is to deliver a Strategy that not only manages growth responsibly but also strengthens the region's liveability and sense of community for generations to come.



Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the first phase of community engagement undertaken to inform the development of the South Coast Future Ready Strategy. It outlines a summary of consultation activities undertaken during the first phase of engagement, the feedback gathered and key insights to inform Council's next steps for the project.

Background

Like many regional communities, Victor Harbor is experiencing significant population change. Research undertaken through Council's planning and growth strategies, regional population projections and local infrastructure assessments shows that the city will continue to grow steadily over coming decades. At the same time, Victor Harbor has one of the oldest population profiles in South Australia, with a median age well above the state average and a high proportion of residents aged over 65. Workforce participation is substantially lower than across South Australia overall, with more than half of residents not participating in the labour force.

An ageing population brings many strengths, including experience, leadership, volunteering and strong community contribution. However, when population growth is heavily weighted toward older age groups, it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain a strong local workforce, maintain essential services and support long-term economic vitality. These challenges are already being felt across the region, particularly in health care, education, construction, hospitality, retail and small business sectors that rely on locally based workers.

Housing trends are reinforcing these pressures. Median house prices have increased sharply since 2020, rental stress affects a significant proportion of households, and much of the existing housing stock is made up of larger detached dwellings despite many households consisting of one or two people. A high number of unoccupied holiday homes and the rapid expansion of over-50s lifestyle villages further limits housing diversity and affordability for younger workers and families. While these developments provide important options for older residents, their concentration in a region already characterised by an ageing population has broader implications for workforce sustainability and service provision.

Victor Harbor also plays an important role beyond its own boundaries. As the primary regional hub for the Southern Fleurieu, the city provides major health, education, retail, community and emergency services for a much larger catchment. Long-term projections indicate Victor Harbor's population could grow substantially by 2051 to between 25,000-36,000, with the broader regional population potentially reaching around 70,000. Without intervention, this growth is likely to continue being concentrated among older age groups, intensifying existing pressures on housing, services, infrastructure and the local economy.

The South Coast Future Ready Strategy brings together this evidence alongside community feedback to guide a more balanced and sustainable future. It responds to the community's desire to carefully manage growth while protecting what people value most – Victor Harbor's environment, lifestyle, community character and coastal town feel. The Strategy focuses on attracting and retaining more working-age residents, supporting local job creation and business growth, expanding education and training pathways, strengthening services and infrastructure, and ensuring a more diverse and appropriate mix of housing.



At its core, the Future Ready Strategy is about creating opportunities for people to live, learn and work locally, while planning responsibly to ensure Victor Harbor can continue to function as a resilient regional centre. By supporting a healthy mix of generations and a stronger local workforce, the Strategy aims to ensure Victor Harbor remains a place where current and future residents can enjoy a high quality of life for decades to come.

To inform the Strategy's development the Council commenced an initial engagement period to understand sentiments and assist with the development of priority actions across housing, jobs, education, liveability and community life.

Purpose of Engagement

The first phase of engagement was designed to test whether the issues identified through Council's background research and strategic work align with lived community experience, and to better understand local priorities for the future. In particular, engagement sought to explore community views on housing, employment, education and training, liveability, service access, demographic change, and the region's longer-term sustainability.

This phase also aimed to identify where people see the greatest opportunities and pressures emerging, what they value most about Victor Harbor and the South Coast, and where Council can play a meaningful role through planning, advocacy, partnerships, and facilitation. The findings from this engagement are intended to inform the development of strategic directions and priority actions for the South Coast Future Ready Strategy.

Consultation Methodology

Consultation was undertaken between 19 January and 19 March 2026. Input and feedback was collected through a number of different methods including:

- A broad community survey – **415 responses**
- Old Scholar Survey – **116 responses**
- School Students Forum – **71 attendees** from Victor Harbor High School, Investigator College, Encounter Lutheran College

The opportunity for involvement in this phase of consultation was promoted widely through a range of communications channels including:

- Your Say Victor Harbor platform (*1,600 visits; 110 discussion paper downloads*)
 - City of Victor Harbor website
 - Direct letter / email (*Council Committees, Advisory and Working Groups / Neighbouring Councils / Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Corporation / Business Victor Harbor / Local Schools*)
 - Listening Posts (*Victor Central – 5 February and 10 February 2026, Encounter Lutheran Night on the Green – 20 February 2026*)
 - Social Media (*Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn*)
 - Press Advertisements (*Fleurieu Sun – 29 January, 5 February, 12 February, 19 February*)
 - E-newsletters (*Victor Viewpoint, City Activation, Your Say Update*)
 - Other community newsletters (*Schools, Business Victor Harbor*)
 - Articles in local newspaper and radio interviews
 - Media release
- 

The Old Scholar Survey was promoted directly via local schools and via Council's social media channels (Facebook, LinkedIn).

Interpreting the Results

The findings presented in this report reflect the views of those who chose to participate in this phase of engagement. They provide a valuable insight into community experience, priorities, and sentiment, but are not intended to represent a statistically complete or fully representative sample of the entire population.

Participation was strongest among established residents and those already connected to the region through living, working, service use, business or community life. While this provides a strong base of local insight, some groups may be less represented in the findings, including younger adults living outside the region, people experiencing acute housing stress, and others who face barriers to participation.

For this reason, the engagement findings should be read alongside Council's broader evidence base, including demographic data, housing and workforce analysis, strategic planning work, infrastructure assessments, and input from targeted stakeholder engagement. Together, these inputs provide a more complete picture to inform Strategy development.

Responses and Feedback - Community Survey

The community survey was open between 19 January to 27 February 2026. A total of **415 responses** were received and are analysed over the following pages.

Key themes emerging from the survey include concerns about housing affordability and availability, transport and connectivity, education and career opportunities, and the economic environment. The things our community values – such as our natural environment and coastline, our relaxed lifestyle, and our strong sense of community – shine through clearly in the responses. Many respondents express a desire for Council to take an active role in shaping outcomes, particularly in housing and education, and for strategies that will attract and retain young professionals and families.

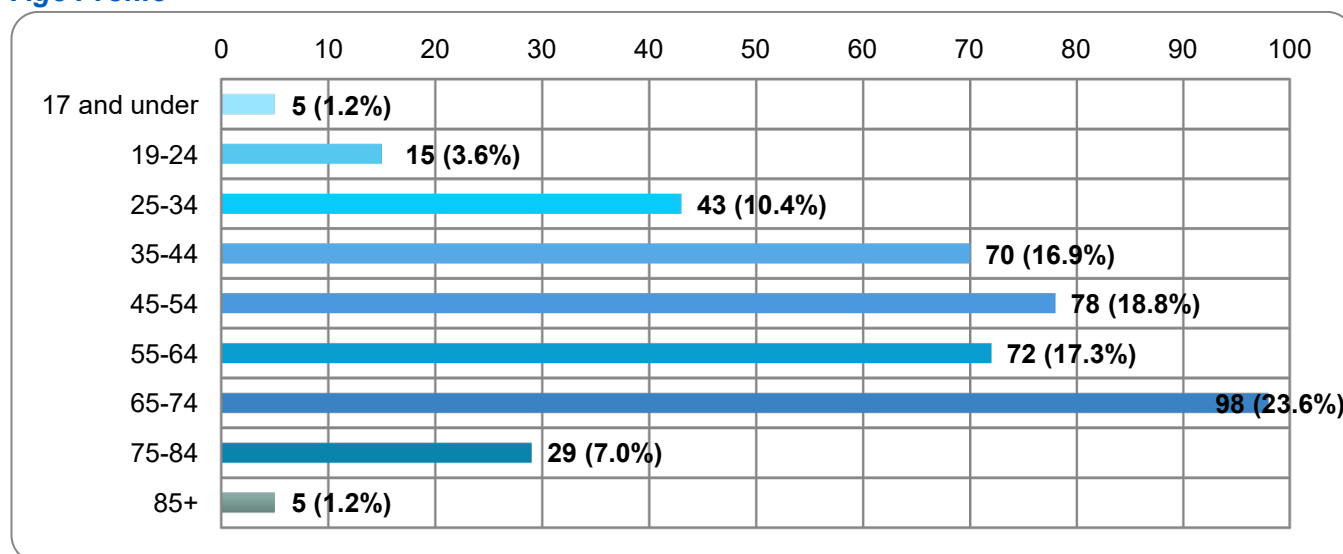
The following analysis groups findings into clear sections on demographics, community satisfaction with current services, housing, education and career pathways, economic development, other insights such as community values and feedback on key focus areas, demographic balancing, and concludes with key insights and considerations for recommendations to include with the Strategy as it is developed in next steps.



Respondent Demographics

This section provides an overview of who responded to the survey, helping to contextualise the perspectives and priorities reflected in the findings.

Age Profile



The age profile of respondents offers insight into which life stages are most represented in the survey and helps inform how different generations may experience local issues and opportunities.

The largest share of responses came from people aged 65–74 (98 responses; 23.6%). This was followed by respondents aged 45–54 (78; 18.8%), 55–64 (72; 17.3%) and 35–44 (70; 16.9%). Younger age groups were less represented: 25–34 (43; 10.4%), 19–24 (15; 3.6%), and 17 and under (5; 1.2%).

Gender

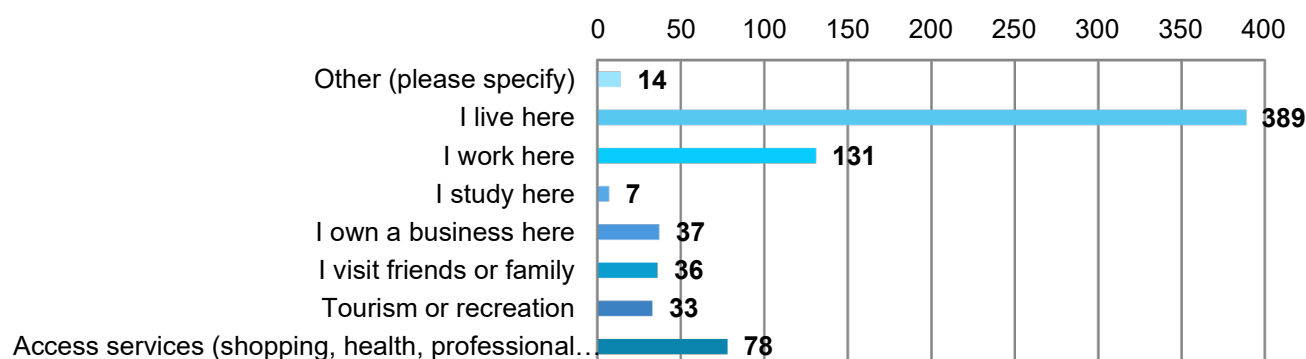
Understanding the gender distribution of respondents assists in assessing whether perspectives reflect a broad cross-section of the community. Most respondents identified as female (271; 65.2%), followed by male (137; 33.0%). A small number of respondents identified as non-binary / other (1; 0.2%) or preferred not to say (6; 1.4%).

Location of Respondents

The majority of respondents were from within the City of Victor Harbor Council area (300), with 41 respondents from Alexandrina Council area (Port Elliot, Middleton, Chiton, Mosquito Hill, Mount Jagged Goolwa). Other areas represented include Normanville (1), Park Holme (1), Adelaide Airport (1), Belair (1), Mount Pleasant (1), Torquay (1), Seaford (1), Middle Beach (1), Bordertown (1), Edwardstown (1).

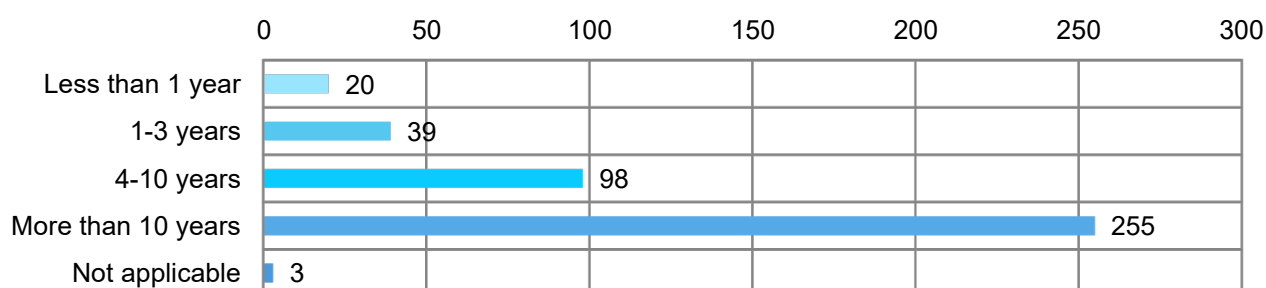
Connection to the Region

What is your connection to Victor Harbor or the South Coast region?



Most respondents live in the region (389), many work here (131), and others access services (78), own a business (37), visit friends and family (36), visit for tourism or recreation (33), or study in the region (7). Of the 'other' responses, three (3) indicated they would be moving to the area in coming years, others identified things that show they live here (2), four (4) have holiday houses, one (1) uses the bikeway, one (1) volunteers and one (1) visits for events.

How long have you lived in, worked in, or been connected to Victor Harbor or the South Coast region?



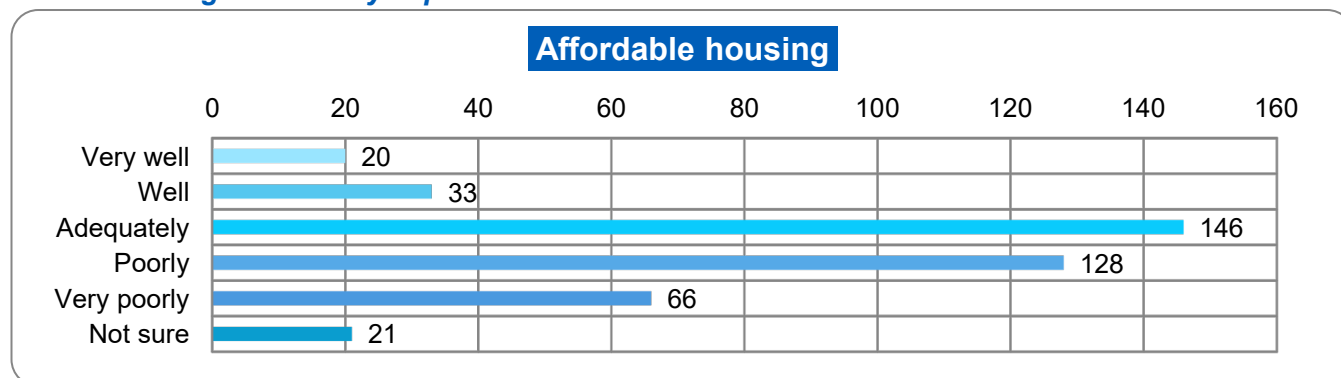
Further, the majority of respondents have lived in Victor Harbor or the South Coast for more than 10 years (255). A further 98 respondents have been connected with the area for 4-10 years, 39 for 1-3 years and 20 for less than a year.

Community Needs Satisfaction

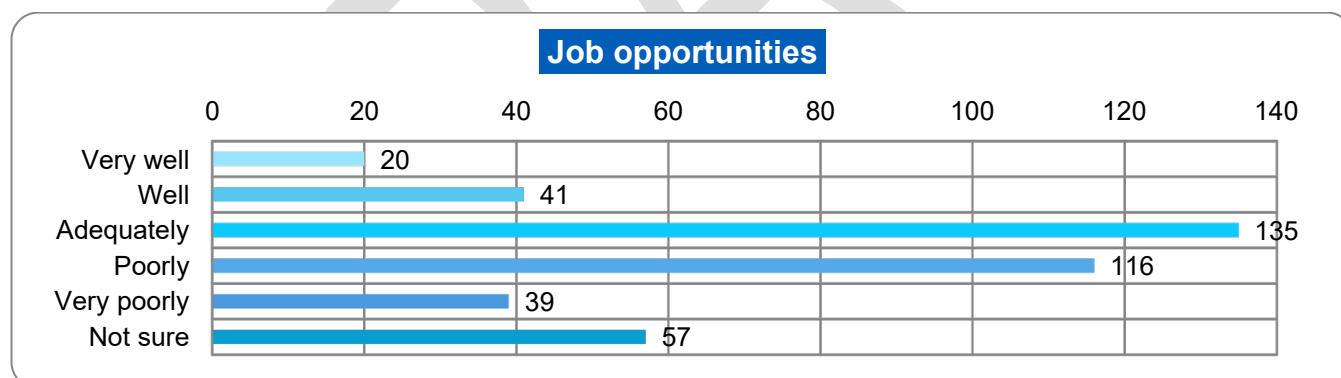
Respondents evaluated how well the region meets community needs across a range of areas. The tables below summarise the counts of responses for each area and rating option.

This section is based primarily on fixed-response rating data. Unlike some later sections of the survey, this question did not include a dedicated open-text field, so interpretation is drawn from comparative rating patterns rather than direct qualitative comment.

Understanding community experiences

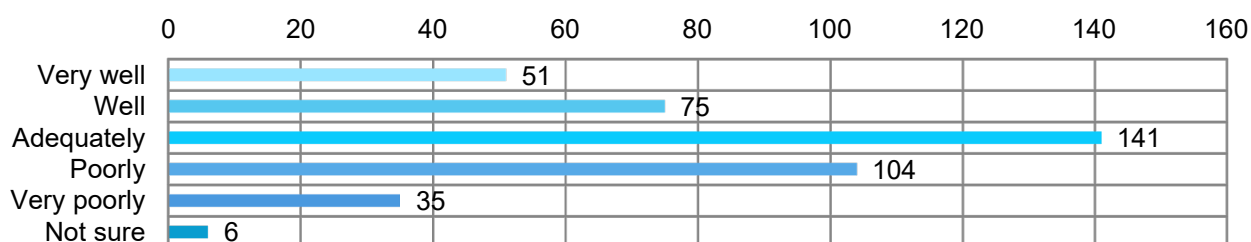


Community sentiment towards affordable housing is predominantly negative. While some respondents feel needs are being met well (33) or very well (20), a large proportion rated housing as poorly (128) or very poorly (66) addressed, suggesting affordability and availability are significant and ongoing pressures. The relatively high number of respondents who indicated that the region meets community needs “adequately” (146) when it comes to affordable housing.



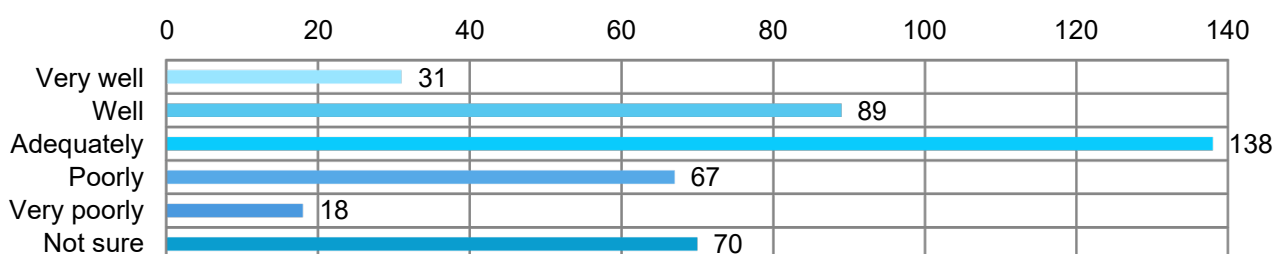
Perceptions of job opportunities are mixed but leaning negative. While some respondents see the region performing well (41) or very well (20), many rated this area as performing adequately (135). A large number of respondents rates job opportunities as meeting community needs poorly (116) or very poorly (39), and a reasonable number (57) were unsure, possibly reflecting underemployment, seasonal work, or limited awareness of available opportunities.

Health services



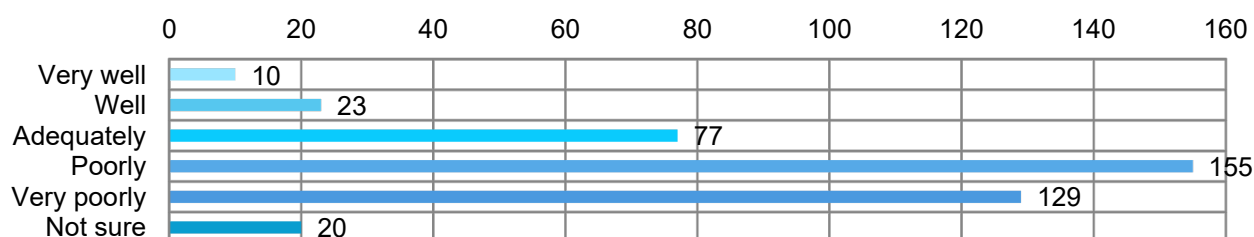
Health services received a moderate overall assessment, with most respondents indicating services are meeting needs adequately (141). There were a portion of respondents who indicated health services were meeting community needs very well (51) or well (75). However, a substantial number of residents rated health services poorly (104) or very poorly (35), highlighting access challenges such as wait times, service availability, or specialist care. There were 6 respondents who were not sure.

Education and training



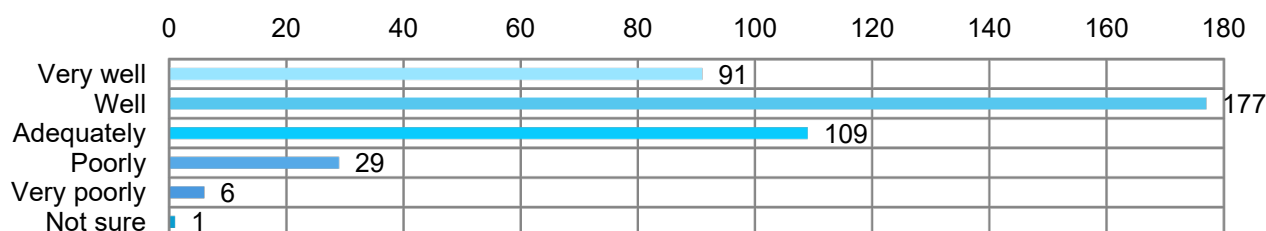
Education and training is viewed more positively than negatively, with strong “well” (89) and “adequately” (138) responses. However, the high level of “not sure” responses (70) suggests limited visibility or awareness of local training options, pathways or post-school opportunities. It also links with the demographic of respondents who may be at a more established level in their career or retired.

Transport and connectivity



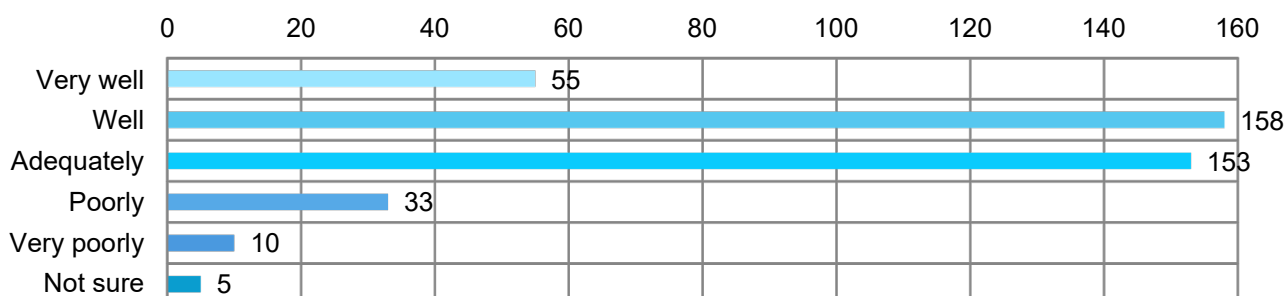
Transport and connectivity is the clearest area of dissatisfaction across the survey. The majority of respondents rated this area as poorly (155) or very poorly (129) meeting community needs, with very few positive ratings in comparison (110 across adequate, well and very well).

Lifestyle and environment



Lifestyle and environment is the strongest performing area by a significant margin. Most respondents rated lifestyle and environment as very well (91) or well (177), with a large number (109) also rating lifestyle and environment as meeting needs adequately. There were very few negative responses – poorly (29) or very poorly (6).

Community and social life



Community and social life is also viewed very positively, with strong “well” (158) and “adequately” (153) responses and minimal dissatisfaction – poorly (33) and very poorly (10).

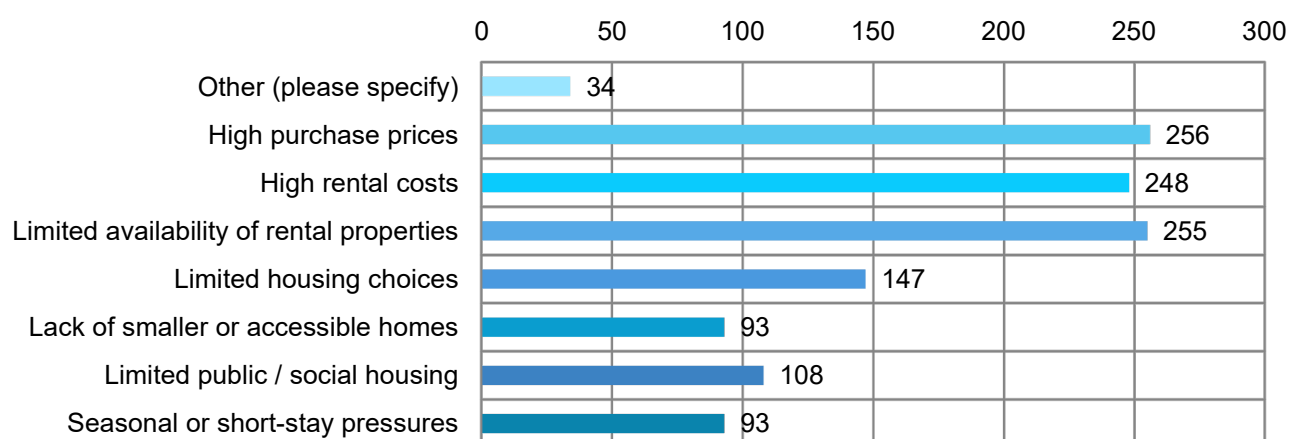
Key Insights from Community Needs Ratings

- Affordable housing is a major pressure point and likely a barrier to attracting and retaining residents, particularly younger people, key workers and those on lower incomes.
- There is concern about the diversity, stability and accessibility of employment, reinforcing the importance of economic development, skills pathways and local job creation.
- While core health services may be functioning, capacity and accessibility remain key concerns, particularly as the population grows and ages.
- There is an opportunity to better promote education and training pathways, particularly those linked to local industries and employment needs.
- Transport is a critical constraint on access to jobs, services and social connection, and is likely affecting overall liveability, particularly for people without access to private vehicles.
- The region’s natural environment, amenity and lifestyle are major strengths and key drivers of community pride, wellbeing and attraction.
- Social connection, community events and a sense of belonging are clear assets that support resilience and quality of life.

Housing

Housing emerged as the single most critical issue in the survey, cutting across affordability, availability, choice, and long-term community sustainability. The strength and consistency of responses indicate that the challenges faced – high prices, not enough rentals and lack of suitable homes – are not just temporary or caused by short-term changes in the market. Rather the issues are structural challenges that require long-term, coordinated efforts to address, not quick fixes or waiting for things to improve without intervention.

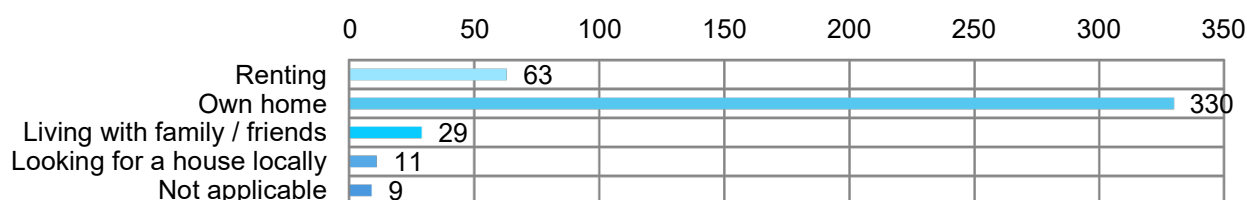
What challenges have you or people you know experienced locally?



The top reported challenges include: High purchase prices (256); Limited availability of rental properties (255); High rental costs (248); Limited housing choices (147); Limited public / social housing (108); Seasonal or short-stay pressures (93); lack of smaller or accessible homes (93).

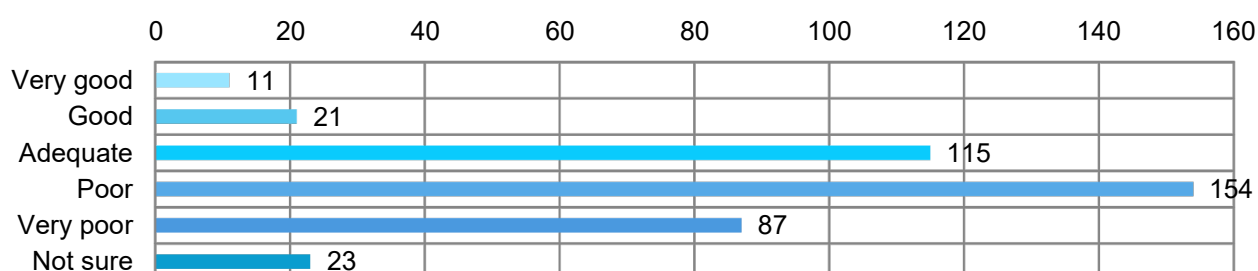
Additional commentary in the 'other' responses illustrated frustration directed at rising prices, high rates, planning controls and development models perceived to prioritise profit over liveability. Respondents highlighted a lack of housing options for young people, families, key workers and those experiencing homelessness, alongside an over-supply of retirement and over-50s developments. There was also concern about the quality and design of new housing, including small lots, poor construction standards, loss of character and heritage, limited green space, and heat-intensive built environments. In contrast, many respondents noted the prevalence of vacant and holiday homes, which they believe exacerbates housing shortages.

What best describes your current housing situation?



The majority of respondents identified as owning their home (330 responses) while others rent (63) or live with family or friends (29), with a few searching for local housing opportunities (11).

How would you rate the availability of suitable and affordable housing in the region?



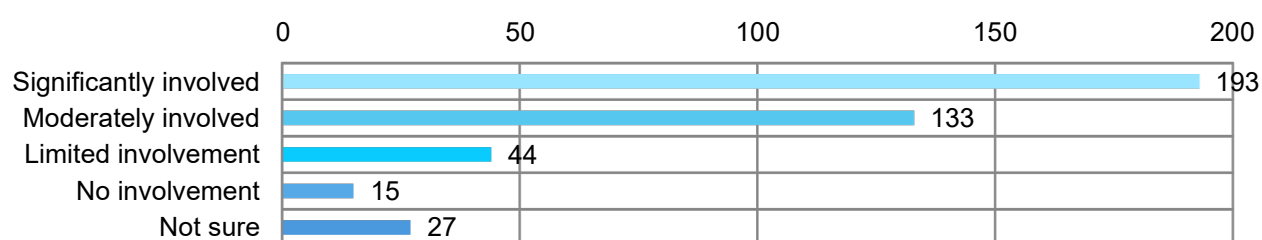
A clear majority of respondents rated housing availability negatively, with 241 respondents (around two-thirds) indicating that housing is poor or very poor. In contrast, only 32 respondents rated availability as good or very good, highlighting a significant imbalance between positive and negative perceptions.

While 115 respondents rated housing availability as “adequate”, this suggests that for many residents housing is barely meeting needs rather than performing well. When combined with the high number of poor (154) and very poor (87) responses, this points to a housing market that is under strain and failing to provide sufficient choice, affordability or suitability for a large proportion of the community.

The relatively low number of “not sure” responses indicates that most respondents have direct experience or strong awareness of housing conditions, reinforcing the reliability of this sentiment as a genuine community concern rather than a perceived or abstract issue.

The response above indicates strong and widespread dissatisfaction with the availability of suitable and affordable housing in the region.

How involved should Council be in influencing housing outcomes (e.g. partnerships, land purchase, facilitation of development)?

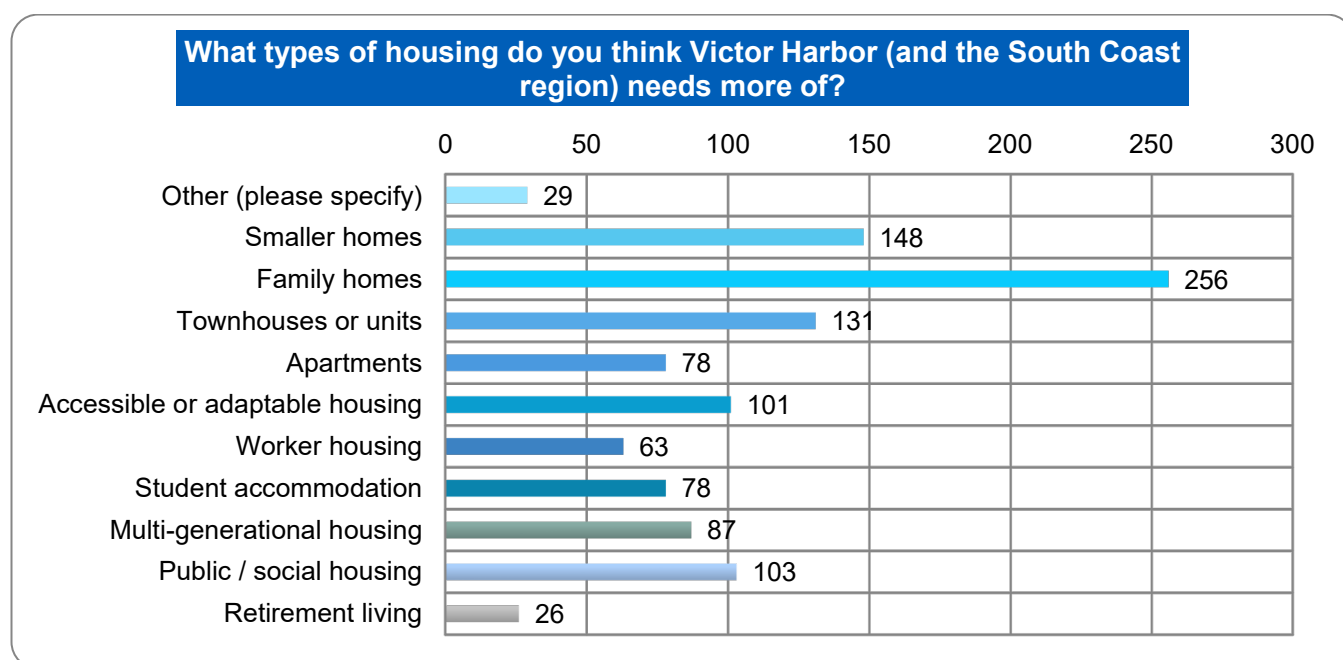


Responses show strong community support for Council taking on an active role in influencing housing outcomes.

A clear majority of respondents (326 respondents, 79%) indicated that Council should be significantly or moderately involved in housing outcomes through mechanisms such as partnerships, land purchase and facilitation of development. Of these, 193 respondents (47%) support significant involvement, representing the largest single response group.

Only a small proportion of respondents (59 in total) believe Council should have limited or no involvement, suggesting minimal community appetite for a hands-off or market-only approach to housing

delivery. The relatively low number of “not sure” responses (27) indicates that most respondents have a clear expectation of Council’s role.



In terms of the types of housing that Victor Harbor (and the South Coast region) needs more of, **family homes** received the highest level of support (256 responses), highlighting strong demand for housing that supports families and long-term settlement.

There is also substantial support for smaller homes (148) and townhouses or units (131), reflecting demand for more affordable, low-maintenance options for singles, couples, downsizers and older residents who are not seeking retirement village living. This points to the need for greater housing diversity rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Responses also highlight the importance of inclusive and purpose-designed housing, including public and social housing (103), accessible or adaptable housing (101), and multi-generational housing (87). This reflects recognition of changing household structures, ageing in place, disability access and support for vulnerable community members.

Demand for apartments (78), student accommodation (78) and worker housing (63), while lower overall, still signals gaps in housing provision linked to education, local employment and workforce attraction, particularly in key service sectors.

By contrast, retirement living received very limited support (26 responses), suggesting that this segment is already well supplied relative to community need, or that further growth in this housing type is not seen as a priority.

The results show a clear and consistent call for a broader mix of housing types, with strongest demand for family homes, followed by smaller homes, townhouses/units and social or affordable housing. This indicates that current housing supply is not meeting the needs of households across different life stages.

Respondents were asked to identify the single most important change that would improve housing affordability or choice. The following is a summary of the key themes amongst the responses:

- **Reducing the impact of short-stay and holiday accommodation** – The most dominant theme was concern about the high number of holiday homes and short-stay rentals sitting vacant for much of the year. Many respondents believe this is directly reducing long-term rental supply, driving up prices and hollowing out neighbourhoods. Common suggestions included caps, higher rates for under-occupied homes, restrictions on Airbnb-style accommodation, or incentives to return properties to the long-term rental market.
 - **Increasing supply, but with the right mix of housing** – There is strong consensus that affordability will not improve without increased supply; however, respondents emphasised that what is built matters as much as how much is built. There were calls for more family homes, smaller and more affordable dwellings, medium-density housing (townhouses, units, low-rise apartments), and fewer retirement-only developments. A lack of housing suited to young people, families and workers was repeatedly highlighted.
 - **Greater provision of social, public and affordable housing** – Many responses stressed the need for more government-supported housing, including social housing, affordable rentals, rent-to-buy options, youth emergency accommodation and housing for low-income workers. Housing was frequently described as a basic need rather than an investment commodity.
 - **Planning reform and faster, more flexible approvals** – Respondents expressed frustration with planning controls, red tape, development costs and slow approval processes, which they believe add to housing costs and discourage diverse housing delivery. There was strong support for zoning reform, pre-approved designs, support for secondary dwellings (granny flats), tiny homes, pods, and multi-generational housing.
 - **Addressing investor and speculative pressure** – Many respondents identified investors, interstate and foreign buyers, and property speculation as key drivers of rising prices. Suggested solutions included limiting investor purchases, prioritising owner-occupiers and first-home buyers, restricting multiple property ownership, and reforming tax settings such as capital gains and negative gearing (acknowledging these are largely outside Council's control).
 - **Reducing upfront and ongoing costs of housing** – Stamp duty was repeatedly cited as a major barrier to affordability, alongside interest rates, council rates, development fees and taxes. Respondents called for stamp duty relief (particularly for first-home buyers and downsizers), reduced rates, and broader government assistance to lower the cost of entering or moving within the housing market.
 - **Improving housing quality, design and liveability** – There was strong resistance to poor-quality, small-lot, repetitive developments perceived to prioritise developer profit over liveability. Respondents called for better design, larger or usable backyards, green space, climate-responsive buildings, retention of character and heritage, and neighbourhoods that support families and community connection.
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- **Supporting workforce and demographic balance** – Many responses linked housing affordability directly to workforce shortages and economic sustainability. There was strong concern that without affordable housing for workers, young people and families, local businesses and essential services will continue to struggle, reinforcing population ageing and long-term decline.
- **Expectation of leadership and advocacy from Council and government** – While acknowledging that many levers sit with State and Federal Government, respondents clearly expect Council to take a leadership role (through advocacy, partnerships, land use decisions, and policy reform) to influence housing outcomes and prioritise permanent residents over short-term or speculative uses.

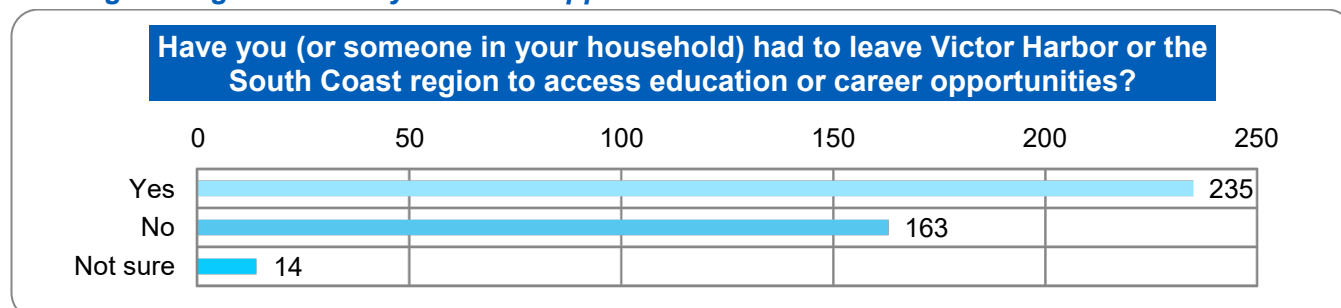
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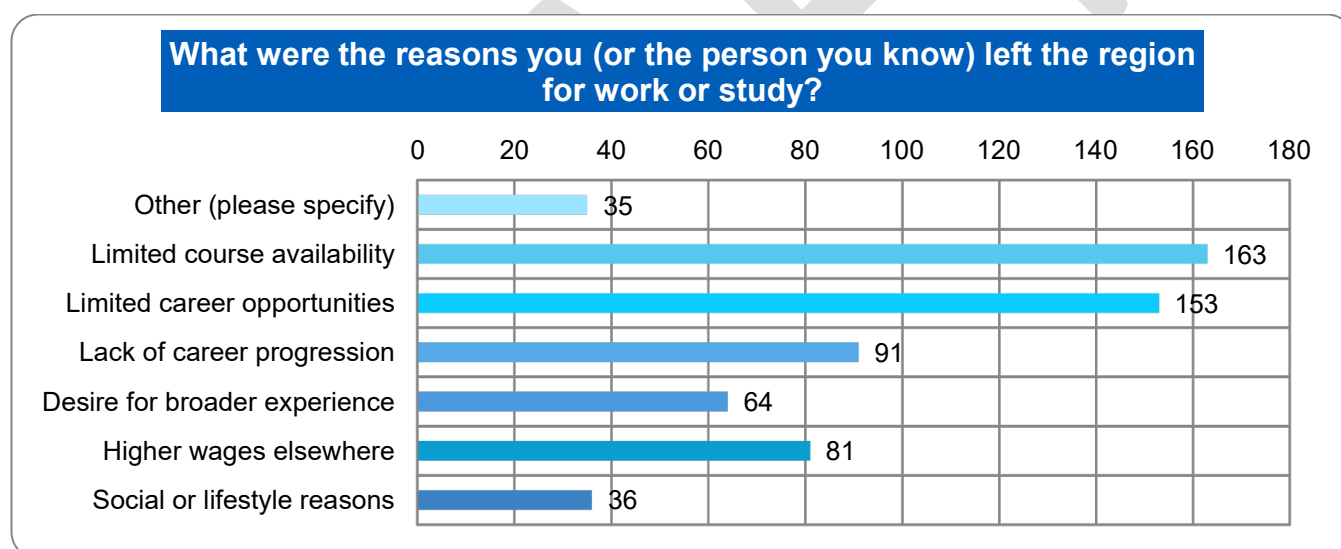
Education and Career Pathways

Education and career pathways emerged as a significant challenge for the region, particularly in relation to retaining young people, building a skilled local workforce, and supporting long-term economic resilience. The results indicate that while residents value the region as a place to live, many do not see it as a place where they can study, build careers, or progress professionally.

Leaving the region for study or career opportunities



A majority of respondents (**235 people**) reported that they, or someone in their household, have had to leave the region to pursue education or career pathways. By comparison, 163 respondents indicated they had not, while only a small number (14) were unsure.



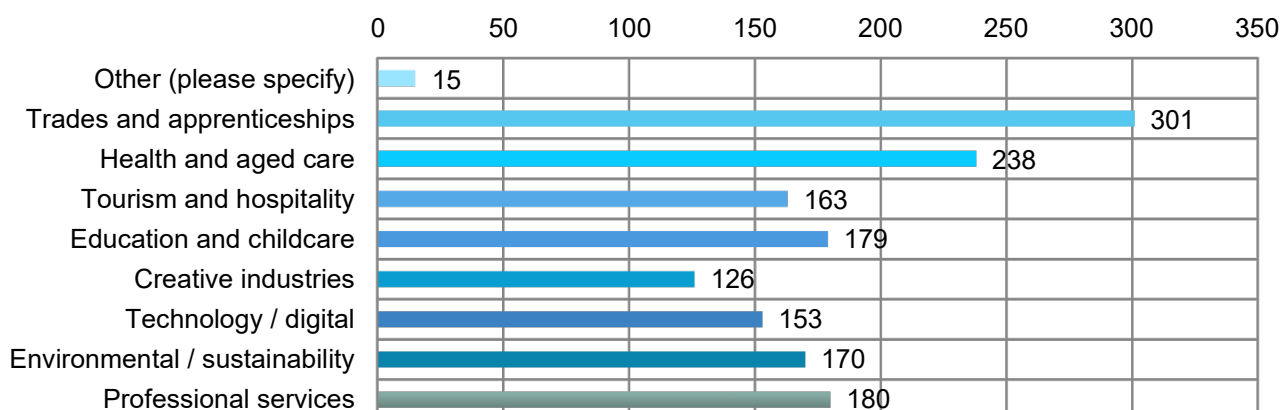
The most commonly cited reason for leaving was limited course availability (163 responses), closely followed by limited career opportunities (153 responses). This suggests that for many residents, particularly young people and working-age adults, the region does not currently offer sufficient local options to pursue education, upskilling or employment aligned with their interests or aspirations.

A significant number of respondents also identified lack of career progression (91 responses) and higher wages elsewhere (81 responses) as motivating factors. This indicates that even where employment is available locally, opportunities for advancement, skill development and income growth may be limited, prompting people to seek opportunities outside the region.

The desire for broader experience (64 responses) reflects a common and expected motivation, particularly among younger cohorts. Only a relatively small number of respondents cited social or lifestyle reasons (36 responses).

Career pathway development

What types of career pathways do you think need to be strengthened locally?



The results show a strong and consistent call to strengthen practical, service-based and professional career pathways locally, reflecting both current workforce pressures and future economic needs.

Trades and apprenticeships emerged as the highest priority for respondents by a significant margin (301 responses), highlighting strong community recognition of the importance of skilled trades to housing delivery, infrastructure development, maintenance, and broader economic resilience. This aligns closely with concerns raised elsewhere in the survey about housing supply, construction quality and local capacity.

Health and aged care was the second most strongly supported pathway (238 responses), reflecting the region's ageing population and growing demand for health, disability and care services.

There was also strong support for strengthening professional services (180 responses), education and childcare (179 responses) and environmental and sustainability-related careers (170 responses). Together, these responses point to a desire for a more diverse, skilled and resilient local economy, capable of supporting families, long-term settlement and emerging priorities such as climate adaptation and environmental management.

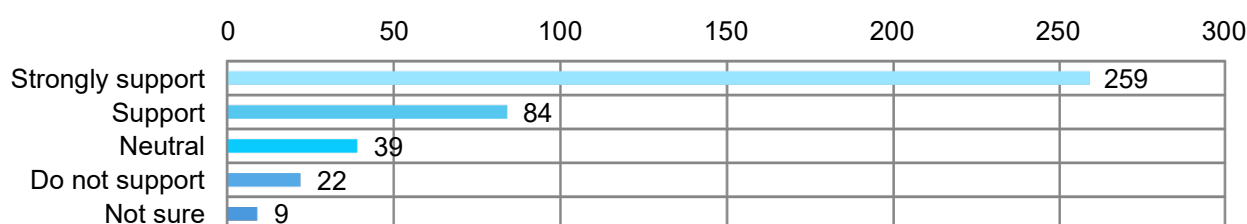
Tourism and hospitality (163 responses) and technology and digital careers (153 responses) were also identified as important, indicating recognition of both the region's established visitor economy and the need to expand into more flexible, future-focused employment opportunities that are less seasonal and more location-independent.

Creative industries (126 responses) received moderate support, suggesting recognition of their role in placemaking, cultural identity and economic diversification, even if they are not seen as the primary employment driver.

Only a small number of respondents selected "other" (15 responses). Responses here nominated sectors like agriculture, mental health, management upskilling and manufacturing.

Expanding higher education opportunities

How strongly do you support Victor Harbor becoming a stronger education hub (e.g. expanded tertiary study options or a 'University City' model)?



There is clear appetite for an expanded education hub with 259 respondents indicating they 'Strongly support' the idea, 84 'Support', 39 'Neutral', 22 'Do not support', 9 'Not sure'.

Respondents were also asked to share what they thought would better support adult learners or people changing careers in the region. The following outlines the key themes to these responses:

- **Strong demand for more local TAFE and tertiary course options** – The most dominant theme was dissatisfaction with the limited range of courses available locally, particularly at the Victor Harbor TAFE campus. Respondents repeatedly called for more short courses, trades, vocational pathways and non-aged-care options, as well as expanded access to university-level study through satellite campuses or partnerships.
- **Need to reduce reliance on travel to Adelaide** – Many respondents highlighted the barrier of commuting for education, citing time, cost, family responsibilities and limited public transport. There was strong support for bringing education to the region through local delivery, study hubs, satellite campuses and improved transport connections for courses that cannot be offered locally.
- **Flexible, adult-friendly learning models are essential** – Adult learners emphasised the need for flexible course delivery, including evening, weekend, part-time, hybrid and online options. Flexibility was seen as critical for people balancing work, caring responsibilities and financial pressures while retraining.
- **Clear pathways from training to real local jobs** – A recurring concern was that training without employment outcomes is ineffective. Respondents called for stronger alignment between education providers and local employers, including apprenticeships, traineeships, paid placements and guaranteed or clear pathways into local jobs after course completion.
- **Better career guidance and transition support for adults** – Many responses highlighted the lack of tailored career advice for adults, distinct from school-leaver pathways or job-network services. Suggestions included local career hubs, mentoring, retraining support services, and guidance that maps existing skills to new industries.
- **Affordability and financial support are major barriers** – Cost was frequently cited as a deterrent to retraining. Respondents called for reduced course fees, subsidies, scholarships, grants, “earn-and-learn” models, and financial support to make retraining viable, particularly for mature-age learners and those supporting families.

- **Access to study spaces, digital infrastructure and support services** – There was strong support for study hubs, libraries, co-working spaces and digital access, including reliable internet, computers and quiet study areas. These were seen as essential to supporting online learning and reducing isolation for adult learners.
- **Workforce diversity limits retraining opportunities** – Some respondents noted that limited local job diversity constrains the value of retraining, as career changes require viable local employment options. This reinforces the link between education, economic diversification and business attraction.
- **Expectation of leadership, coordination and advocacy** – While acknowledging that many levers sit with State and Federal Government, respondents clearly expect local leadership and coordination—including advocacy, partnerships with universities and industry, promotion of opportunities, and alignment between training provision and regional workforce needs.

Actions and ideas suggested by respondents

Respondents were asked to share their ideas for actions that Council (or others) could explore to improve education and career pathways in Victor Harbor and the South Coast region. The following is a summary of the key themes emerging through the responses:

- **Strong demand for expanded local TAFE and vocational offerings** – The most dominant theme is the need to significantly expand the range, scale and relevance of courses at the local TAFE. Respondents repeatedly called for more subjects, more trades, more short courses, and broader options beyond early childhood and individual support. There is strong support for trades, health, technology and industry-aligned training delivered locally.
- **Interest in local university presence, hubs or satellite campuses** – Many respondents supported exploring university hubs, satellite campuses or regional branches, rather than necessarily a full “university city” model. There was recognition that this would need to be staged, realistic and aligned to local strengths such as health, environment, marine, agriculture, tourism and technology. Study hubs, distance education centres and hybrid delivery models were widely supported.
- **Education must be directly linked to real local jobs** – A recurring and strong theme is that education without employment outcomes is ineffective. Respondents emphasised apprenticeships, traineeships, paid placements, internships and work experience linked to local employers. Stronger partnerships between schools, TAFE, universities, Council and industry were seen as essential.
- **Clear, visible education-to-employment pathways are missing** – Many respondents highlighted the need for clear, practical pathway mapping, showing how people move from school → training → jobs → career progression locally. Ideas included career expos (for all ages), pathways maps, employer advisory groups and better integration of careers education in schools.
- **Transport and accommodation are critical enablers** – Limited public transport and lack of student, placement and short-term accommodation were frequently identified as barriers. Respondents noted that people cannot take up study or placements locally if they cannot reliably get around or find somewhere affordable to live.
- **Support for apprenticeships, traineeships and school-based pathways** – There was strong support for school-based apprenticeships, trade schools, technical colleges and VET-in-schools

programs, particularly from Years 10–12. Respondents stressed the importance of practical exposure, earlier career exploration and reducing the need to travel to Adelaide for trade training.

- **Adult learners and career changers need flexible options** – Many responses focused on flexible, adult-friendly education models, including online learning supported by local hubs, short and stackable courses, micro-credentials, retraining programs and financial support for mature-age learners, parents and people returning to work.
- **Housing, affordability and education are interconnected** – Several respondents highlighted that education, training, housing and cost of living must be planned together. Without affordable housing and part-time jobs, students and trainees cannot realistically study or remain in the region.
- **Council's role as connector, advocate and facilitator** – There was a strong expectation that Council should act as a connector rather than sole provider. Respondents saw Council bringing together schools, training providers, universities, employers, industry groups and governments, advocating for State investment, enabling land and facilities, and coordinating shared initiatives.
- **Better promotion of existing education assets and strengths** – Many respondents felt that current assets are under-promoted, including local schools, the study hub, the hospital training role, digital connectivity and lifestyle advantages. Improving awareness and perception (locally and externally) was seen as important to attracting providers and students.
- **Caution about scale, identity and unintended impacts** – While supportive of expanded education options, some respondents urged caution about scale, cost and cultural fit. Concerns were raised about affordability, infrastructure capacity, student housing, and ensuring education growth complements the region's character and liveability.



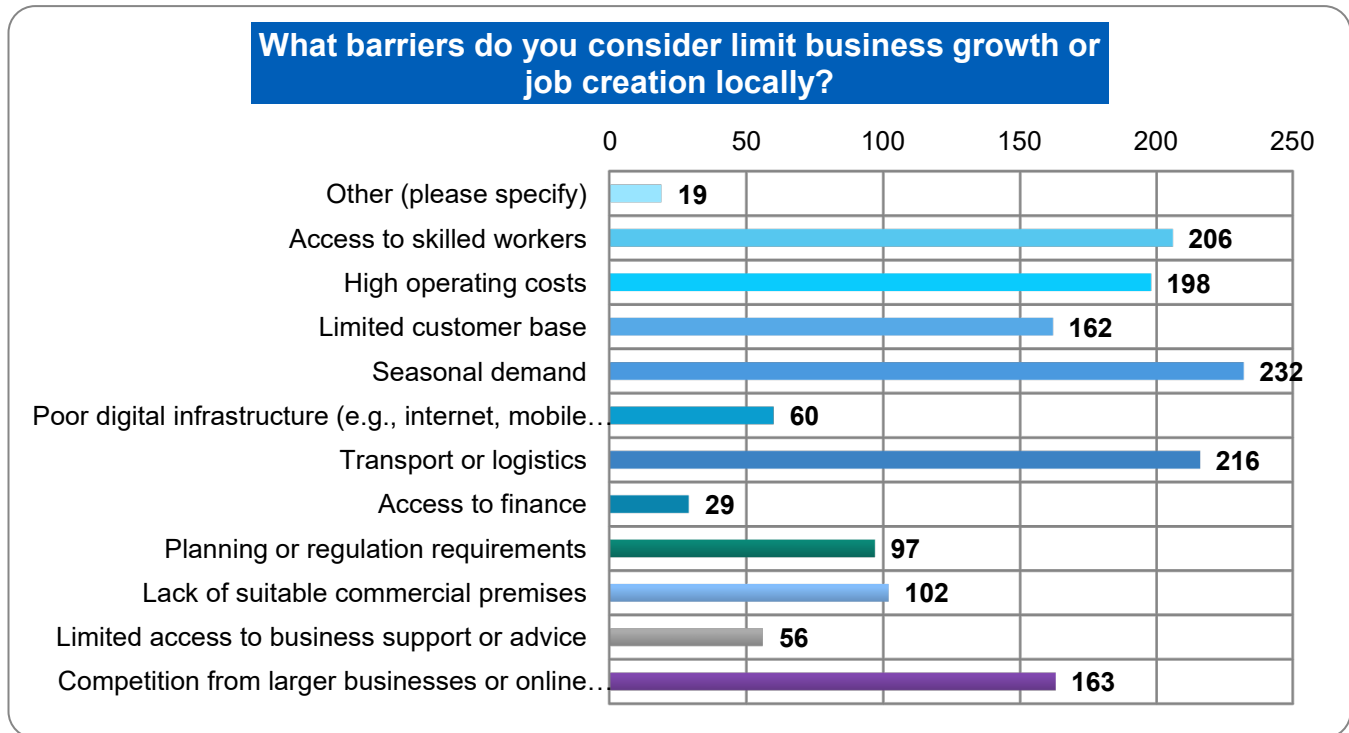
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Economic Development

The survey results indicate that the community sees economic development as both a challenge and an opportunity. While there is strong recognition of the region's potential, respondents also identify clear barriers that are limiting business growth, job creation, and long-term economic resilience.

Barriers for business growth and job creation



Our local business environment faces a range of barriers, and respondents weighed in on how to improve conditions for growth and innovation. The top barriers limiting business growth include seasonal demand pressures (232), transport and logistics challenges (216), lack of skilled workers (206), high operating costs (198), competition from larger businesses or online retailers (163), a limited customer base (162), and inadequate premises or infrastructure (102) and, planning or regulation requirements (97).

Supporting innovation, entrepreneurs and start-ups

Compared with other questions, respondents provided less detailed input on innovation, entrepreneurship and startup support. This suggests that while the community can clearly identify barriers to growth, there is less shared understanding or visibility around what an innovation-focused economic agenda might look like locally.

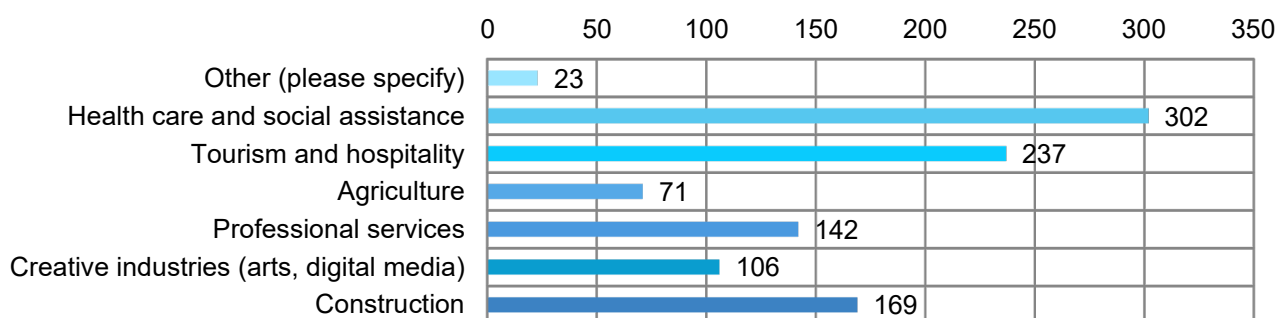
A high-level summary of how we could better support innovation, entrepreneurs and start-ups is provided below:

- **Reduce the cost and risk of starting a business** – The strongest and most consistent message is that high commercial rents, rates, utilities and upfront costs are the biggest barriers to innovation. Respondents want measures that lower early-stage risk, such as subsidised or reduced rent, rate concessions, low-cost leases, and financial relief during the first years of operation.

- **Provide affordable, flexible spaces to work and collaborate** – There is strong support for co-working spaces, business hubs, incubators, maker spaces and pop-up locations, particularly in vacant or under-utilised buildings. These spaces are seen as critical for collaboration, visibility, mentoring and building a local start-up culture.
- **Simplify processes and reduce red tape** – Many respondents emphasised the need for less bureaucracy, simpler approvals and clearer guidance, particularly for small, home-based, pop-up or digital businesses. Reducing friction was often seen as just as important as funding.
- **Offer targeted grants, incentives and seed funding** – There is broad support for small, accessible grants, micro-loans and incentives, particularly for early-stage businesses. Respondents stressed that funding should be easy to access, proportionate, and focused on enabling ideas to be tested locally.
- **Strengthen mentoring, networks and business capability** – Innovation is seen as requiring mentorship, coaching, networking and skills development, not just money. Respondents called for founder meet-ups, business mentoring programs, training in business basics, and peer support, especially for young entrepreneurs.
- **Revitalise the mainstreet and commercial precincts** – Many responses linked innovation to the decline and lack of diversity in the town centre, particularly Ocean Street. High rents, vacant shops and limited retail mix were seen as stifling new ideas. Respondents want more vibrant, diverse and startup-friendly precincts.
- **Position Victor Harbor as a lifestyle-based, remote-work destination** – Respondents highlighted the opportunity to attract digital workers, online businesses and remote professionals, leveraging lifestyle, connectivity and liveability. Innovation is not only seen as physical retail, but also digital, service-based and home-grown.
- **Council as enabler, connector and advocate (not just regulator)** – There is a clear expectation that Council should act as a **facilitator** connecting entrepreneurs with space, funding, mentors, procurement opportunities and State/Federal programs.

Areas with growth potential

Which industries or sectors do you think have the most potential for growth in Victor Harbor and the South Coast region?



The industries viewed as having most potential for growth are: Health care and social assistance (302), Tourism and hospitality (237), Construction (169), Professional services (142), Creative industries (arts, digital media) (106), Agriculture (71).

When asked what kind of jobs respondents hoped would be available in Victor Harbor and the South Coast for future generations, the following key themes emerged:

- **Desire for a diverse and balanced local economy** – The strongest overarching theme is a call for greater job diversity. Respondents consistently emphasised the need for a broad mix of roles across trades, health, professional services, technology, education, tourism, retail and creative industries. There was strong resistance to the region being defined by only a narrow set of employment options.
- **Strong emphasis on secure, year-round and career-based employment** – Many respondents highlighted the importance of stable, full-time, year-round jobs with progression, rather than short-term, casual or purely seasonal roles. This reflects concern that existing employment patterns do not always support long-term career development, financial security or family life.
- **Trades, construction and apprenticeships as essential foundations** – Skilled trades, apprenticeships and construction-related jobs were repeatedly identified as critical for the future, supporting housing delivery, infrastructure, maintenance and essential services. Respondents stressed the need for genuine apprenticeships and clear pathways that allow young people to train and work locally.
- **Health, aged care and allied health as ongoing growth sectors** – There is strong recognition that health, aged care, disability support and allied health will remain central to the regional economy due to population ageing. However, many respondents emphasised the need for these roles to be well-paid, well-supported and professionally sustainable, with opportunities beyond entry-level care work.
- **Expansion of professional, knowledge-based and skilled service roles** – Respondents frequently expressed hope for more professional careers, including roles in education, law, accounting, engineering, management, research and government services. This reflects a desire for employment options that allow university-educated residents to remain in the region.
- **Technology, digital and remote-enabled work opportunities** – There was strong interest in technology, digital and remote work, including IT, digital services, AI-enabled roles and professional jobs that can be done remotely. Many respondents see remote work as a key opportunity to align lifestyle with modern employment patterns and reduce the need to relocate.
- **Environmental, sustainability and marine-based careers** – Jobs linked to environmental management, sustainability, conservation, renewable energy, coastal protection, marine industries and sustainable agriculture were commonly cited. These roles were seen as both future-focused and well aligned with the region's natural assets and identity.
- **Tourism and hospitality sector expanded, higher-quality and less seasonal** – Tourism and hospitality were widely recognised as important, but respondents often stressed the need for all-year tourism, higher-quality jobs, stronger career pathways and diversification (e.g. eco-tourism, events, marine tourism, creative and cultural offerings), rather than reliance on peak-season work alone.
- **Creative industries and cultural jobs as part of liveability and identity** – While not seen as the primary employment base, creative industries (arts, design, music, film, writing and cultural venues) were valued for their role in placemaking, identity, community vibrancy and economic diversification.

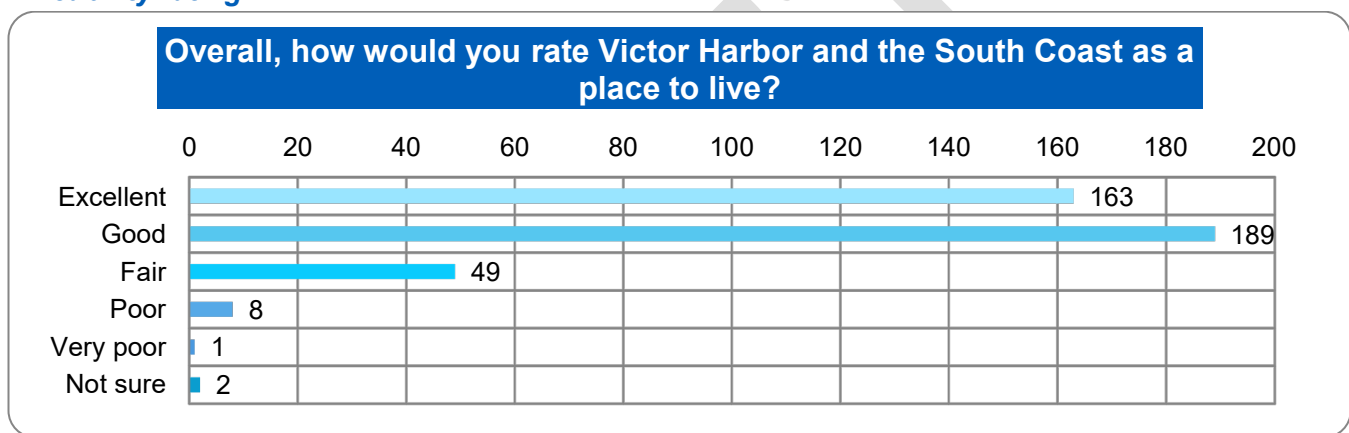


- **Local jobs that allow young people to stay and return** – A recurring theme was the hope that future generations will not have to leave the region to pursue their aspirations. Respondents expressed a strong desire for jobs that allow young people to study, work, progress and return to the region while maintaining family and community connections.
- **Fair, meaningful and dignified work** – Beyond specific industries, many respondents emphasised that future jobs should offer fair pay, purpose, work-life balance and ethical employment practices, including opportunities for people with disabilities and those from diverse backgrounds.

Liveability and Cultural Vibrancy

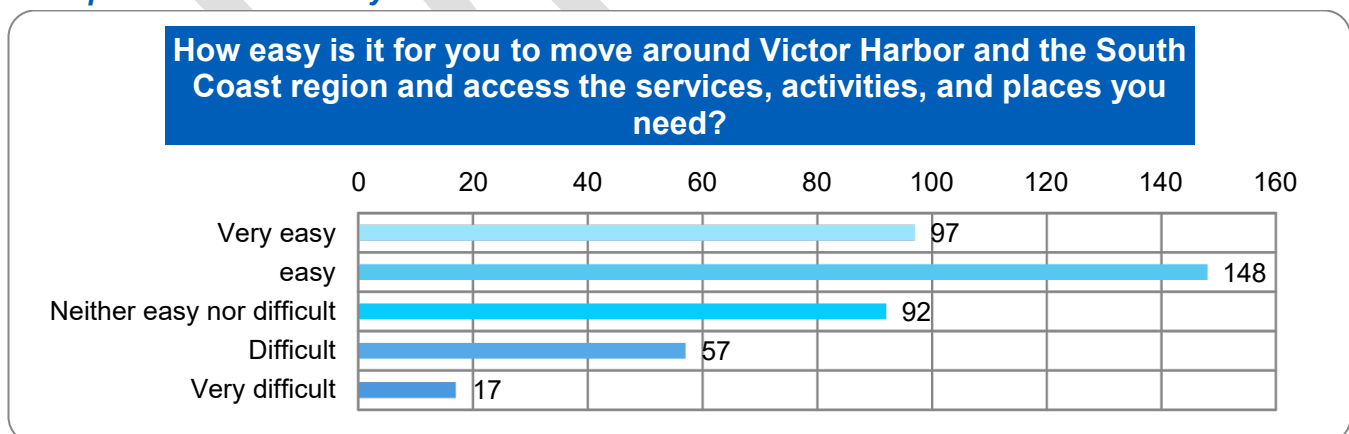
Overall, respondents rate Victor Harbor and the South Coast positively as a place to live, reflecting strong attachment to the region.

Liveability rating



Most respondents rated the region as an excellent (163) or good (189) place to live. Fewer respondents rated it as fair (49), poor (8) or very poor (1), indicating that while overall sentiment is positive, there are areas requiring improvement to sustain liveability over time.

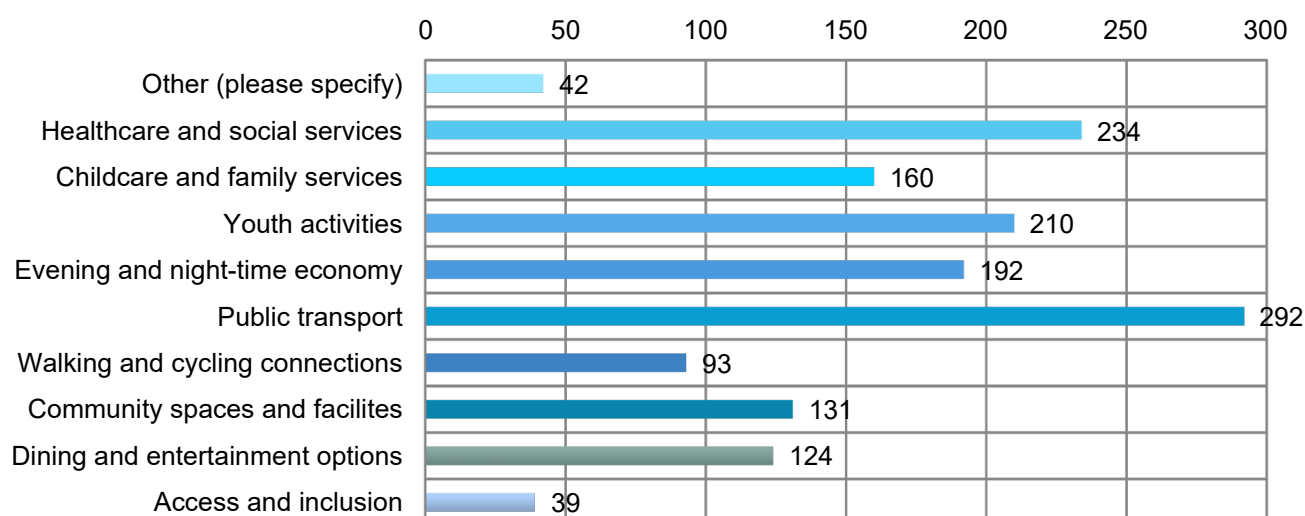
Transport and connectivity



When asked how easy it is to move around the region and access the services, activities, and places they need, responses were more mixed. Many respondents rated this as easy (148), very easy (97) or neither easy nor difficult (92). Fewer respondents indicated it was difficult (57) or very difficult (17).

Areas to improve liveability

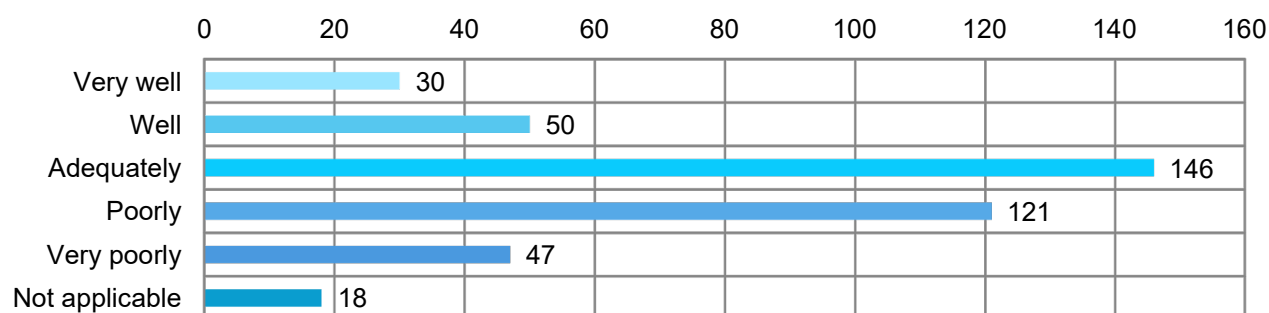
Which areas do you think most need improvement to support liveability in Victor Harbor and the South Coast region?



Respondents were asked to identify areas most in need of improvement to support liveability in Victor Harbor and the South Coast region. The most frequently nominated areas for improvement were public transport (292), healthcare and social services (234), youth activities (210), evening and night-time economy (192) and childcare and family services (160).

Night-time economy

How well does Victor Harbor and the South Coast region currently meet your needs for evening and after-hours activities?



Evening and after-hours activities were identified as a notable gap. When asked how well the region meets their needs for evening and after-hours activities, many respondents rated this as being met poorly (121) or very poorly (47). A further group rated it as adequate (146). Fewer respondents felt these needs were met well (50) or very well (30), highlighting limited options outside daytime hours.

Respondents identified a range of evening or social activities they would like to see more of. The most commonly cited activities include live music and entertainment (182), cafés and restaurants open later (164), arts and cultural events such as theatre, exhibitions or performances (141), markets and festivals (126), family-friendly evening activities (118), and youth-focused social spaces (97).

Making Victor Harbor and the South Coast more liveable and vibrant

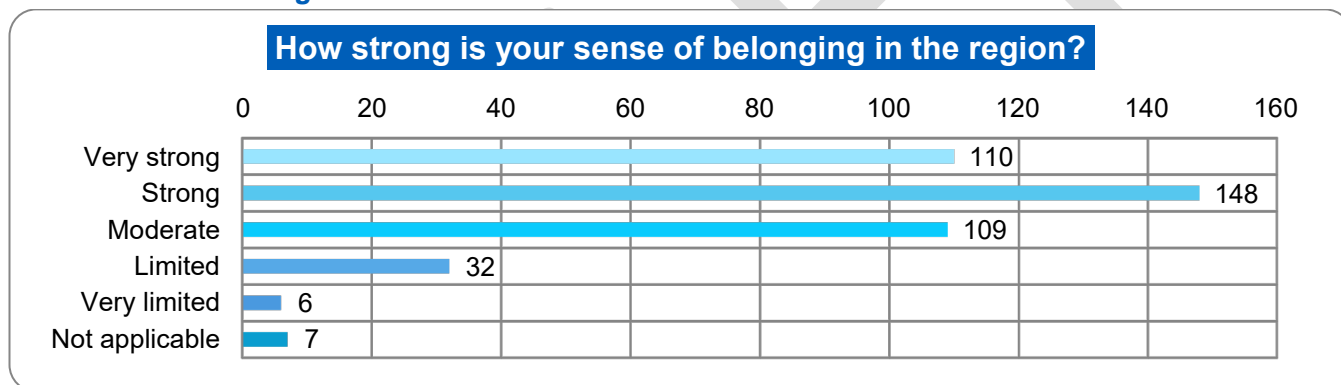
When asked what would make Victor Harbor and the South Coast region a more liveable and vibrant place for people of all ages, respondents most frequently highlighted improved transport options (204), more affordable and diverse housing (193), increased social and cultural activities (176), better public spaces and facilities (149), and more opportunities for young people to work, learn, and connect locally (138). Together, these responses show that perceptions of liveability and vibrancy are closely linked to access, inclusion, and opportunities across all life stages.

Engagement and Sense of Belonging

The survey results indicate that many people feel a strong sense of belonging to Victor Harbor and the South Coast, but that opportunities to participate more deeply in community life are unevenly accessible. While informal connection is strong, structured pathways into leadership and broader participation are less visible.

Responses to questions on engagement and belonging provide insight into how connected people feel to Victor Harbor and the South Coast, how they participate in community life, and what barriers and opportunities exist to strengthen involvement and local leadership.

Connection to the region



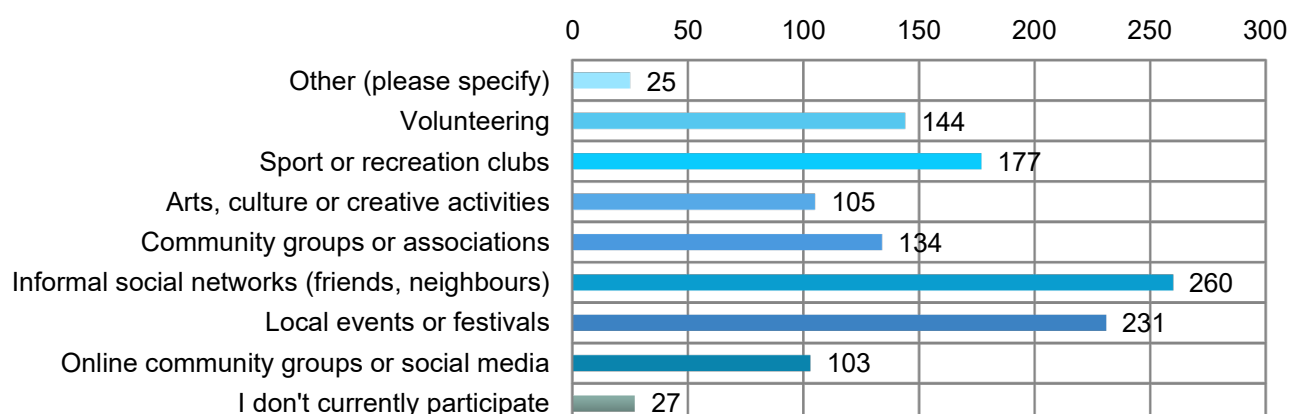
Respondents were asked how strong their sense of belonging in the region was. A substantial majority of respondents (258 people) rated their sense of belonging as strong or very strong, suggesting that many residents feel connected to the community, place and social fabric of the region. A further 109 respondents reported a moderate sense of belonging, indicating a broad base of connection even if it is not always deep or consistent for everyone.

Only a small number of respondents (38 in total) reported a limited or very limited sense of belonging, while very few selected “not applicable.” This suggests that feelings of disconnection are present but not widespread.

Overall, the results highlight community connection and belonging as a clear strength of the region, reinforcing findings elsewhere in the survey about positive perceptions of lifestyle, community and social life.

Participating in local community

How do you currently connect with or participate in the local community?



Respondents were asked how they currently connect with or participate in the local community. The most common forms of connection included participation in informal social networks with friends, and neighbours (260), local events or festivals (231), sport or recreation clubs (177), volunteering (144), community groups and associations (134). A smaller number reported engaging through arts, culture, creative activities (105), or online community groups and social media (103).

The most common way respondents connect with the community is through informal social networks, such as friends and neighbours (260 responses). This highlights the importance of everyday relationships, local familiarity and social proximity in building connection and belonging.

Participation in local events or festivals is also very strong (231 responses), reinforcing the role of community events as key touchpoints for social interaction, shared identity and local pride. This aligns with broader feedback about the value of markets, festivals and place-based activities in creating vibrancy.

Sport and recreation play a significant role in community connection (177 responses), reflecting the importance of physical activity, clubs and outdoor recreation as social connectors across age groups. Similarly, volunteering (144 responses) and community groups or associations (134 responses) continue to provide meaningful pathways for civic participation, contribution and social cohesion.

Engagement through arts, culture and creative activities (105 responses) and online community groups or social media (103 responses) shows that both creative expression and digital platforms contribute to how people stay connected, although these are secondary to face-to-face and place-based interactions.

Only a small number of respondents (27) indicated that they do not currently participate in the local community, suggesting that overall levels of connection and participation are relatively high, though there remains an opportunity to better reach and include those who feel disengaged.

Actions that could grow local leadership and community involvement

When asked what opportunities or initiatives would help grow local leadership and community involvement, the following key themes emerged in responses:

- **Strong focus on youth leadership and early engagement** – The most consistent theme is the need to actively engage young people and teenagers, particularly through youth councils, mentoring, leadership programs, school-to-community pathways, apprenticeships, and practical, hands-on projects. Many respondents stressed that leadership needs to be cultivated early to build confidence, skills and a sense of ownership in the community.
- **Clear pathways and low-barrier entry points into leadership** – Respondents repeatedly highlighted the need for clear, accessible and visible pathways to get involved, including simple entry points into volunteering, boards, committees, sporting clubs and community groups. Time-poor families and working adults need flexible options that do not require long-term or high-commitment upfront.
- **Mentoring and intergenerational knowledge transfer** – There was strong support for mentoring programs, particularly those that connect experienced community members, retirees, business owners and professionals with emerging leaders. Intergenerational approaches were seen as important for succession planning, skill transfer and community continuity.
- **Training, capability-building and leadership development** – Many respondents called for free or low-cost leadership training, governance workshops, project management skills, confidence-building and professional development for volunteers and community leaders. Leadership was seen as a skill that can be learned, not just an innate trait.
- **Better communication, promotion and awareness** – Improve visibility of existing opportunities (events, groups, volunteering and leadership pathways) through clearer, consistent communication and accessible information channels.



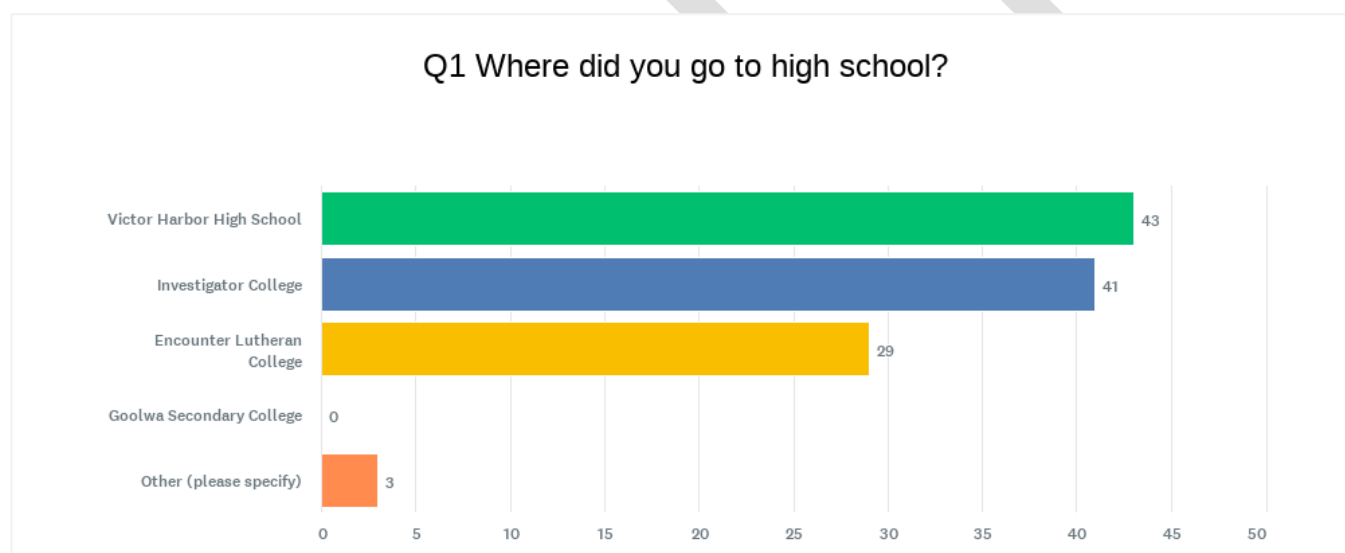
Old Scholar Survey - Responses and Feedback

The Old Scholar Survey was undertaken to better understand the perspectives of younger people who have grown up in the region, including those who have remained local and those who have moved elsewhere for study, work, or lifestyle reasons. This was an important input to the Future Ready Strategy, given the project's focus on long-term demographic balance, local career pathways, and retaining and attracting working-age residents.

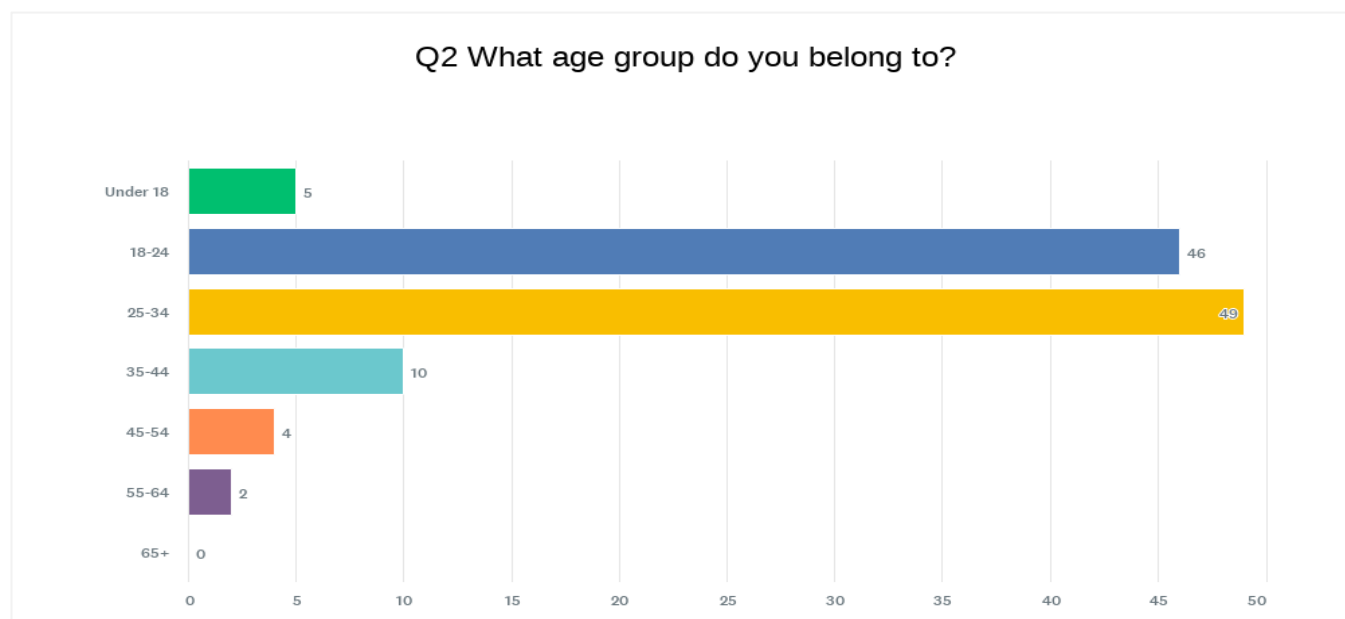
A total of **116 responses** were received through the Old Scholar Survey. Feedback from this cohort reinforced a number of themes emerging from the broader community survey, particularly in relation to limited tertiary and vocational pathways, the need to leave the region for career progression, housing affordability pressures, and a desire for greater social and cultural vibrancy.

Respondent Demographics

There was a mix of responses across the three high schools in Victor Harbor. There were 43 responses from people who went to Victor Harbor High School, 41 from Investigator College and 29 from Encounter Lutheran College. Of the respondents that specified 'other': St Peters Girls (1), Investigator and Encounter Lutheran (1), and did not say (1).

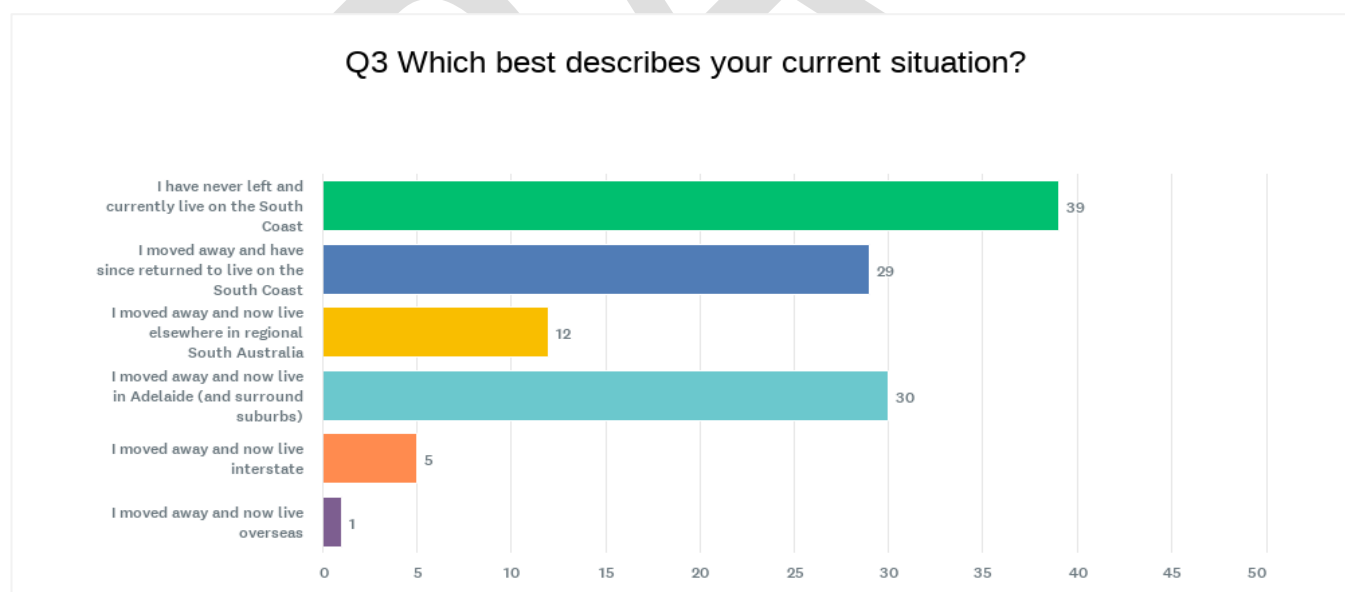


In terms of age profile of respondents, around 82% of respondents are aged 18-34, with the remainder mainly spread across mid-career and family-forming age groups.



Where are they now

Of the respondents 39 (or 34%) have never left the South Coast region, 29 (25%) moved away and have since returned to the South Coast region, and 48 (41%) moved away and now live elsewhere (regional SA – 12; Greater Adelaide – 30; Interstate – 5; Overseas – 1).

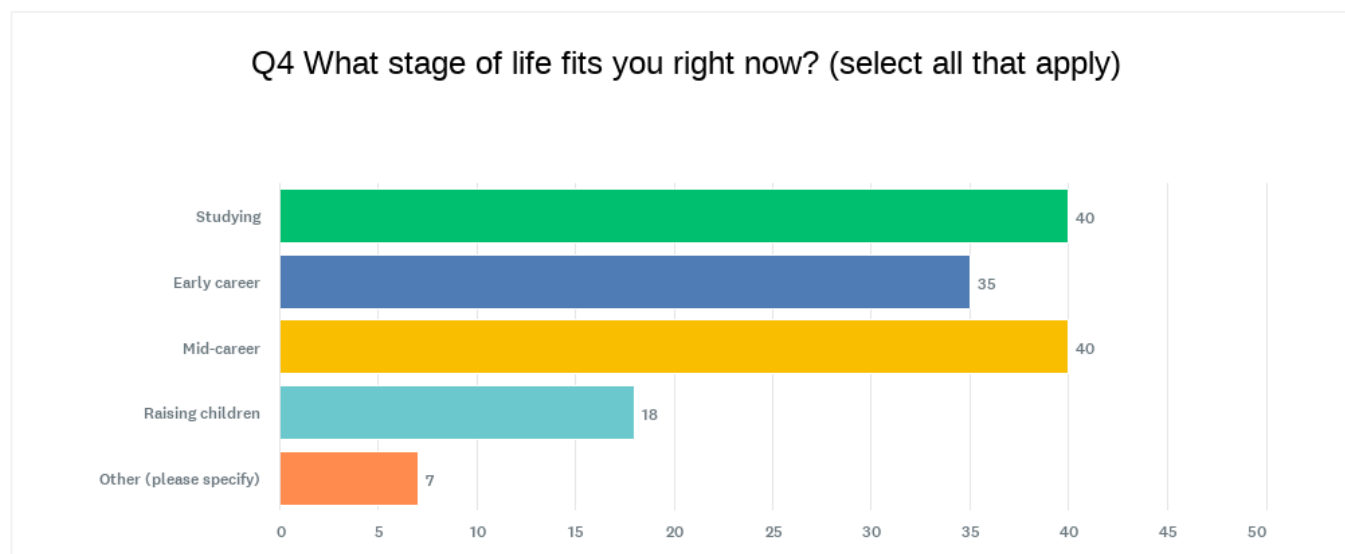


Through the responses a clear pattern emerges:

- **Leaving is most common immediately after school**, linked to education and early employment.
- **Returning is more common at later life stages**, particularly when raising families, provided employment and housing are viable.

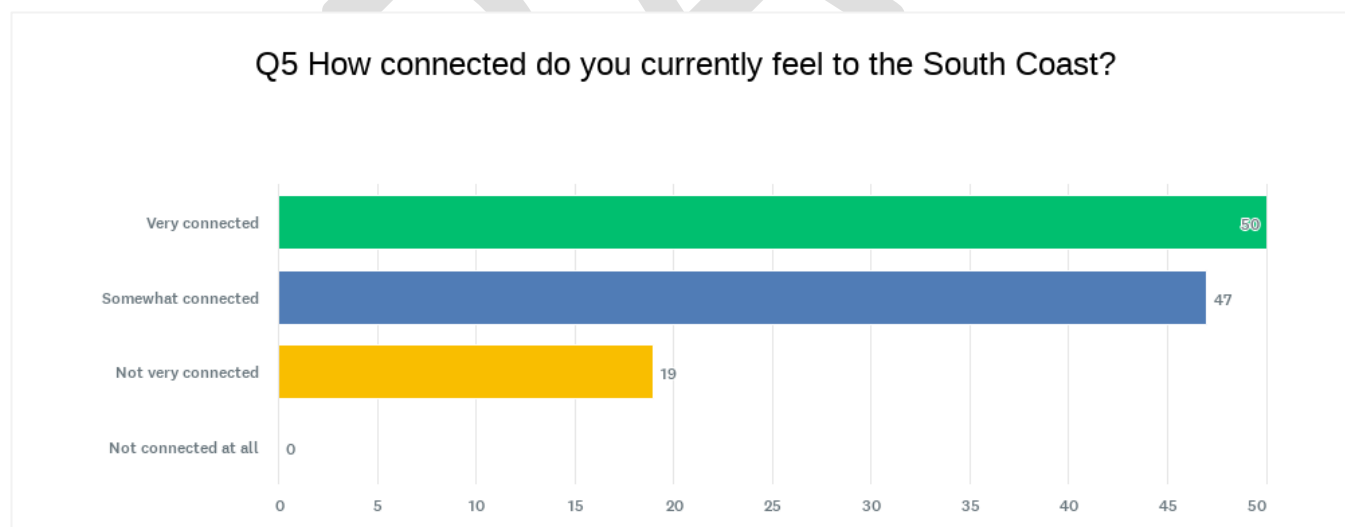
Stage of Life

In terms of stage of life, 40 respondents indicated they were studying, 40 were mid-career, 35 were in early career and 18 were raising children. Of the 'other' responses, 4 were travelling, 1 working, 1 approaching retirement and 1 a business owner.



Connection to the South Coast

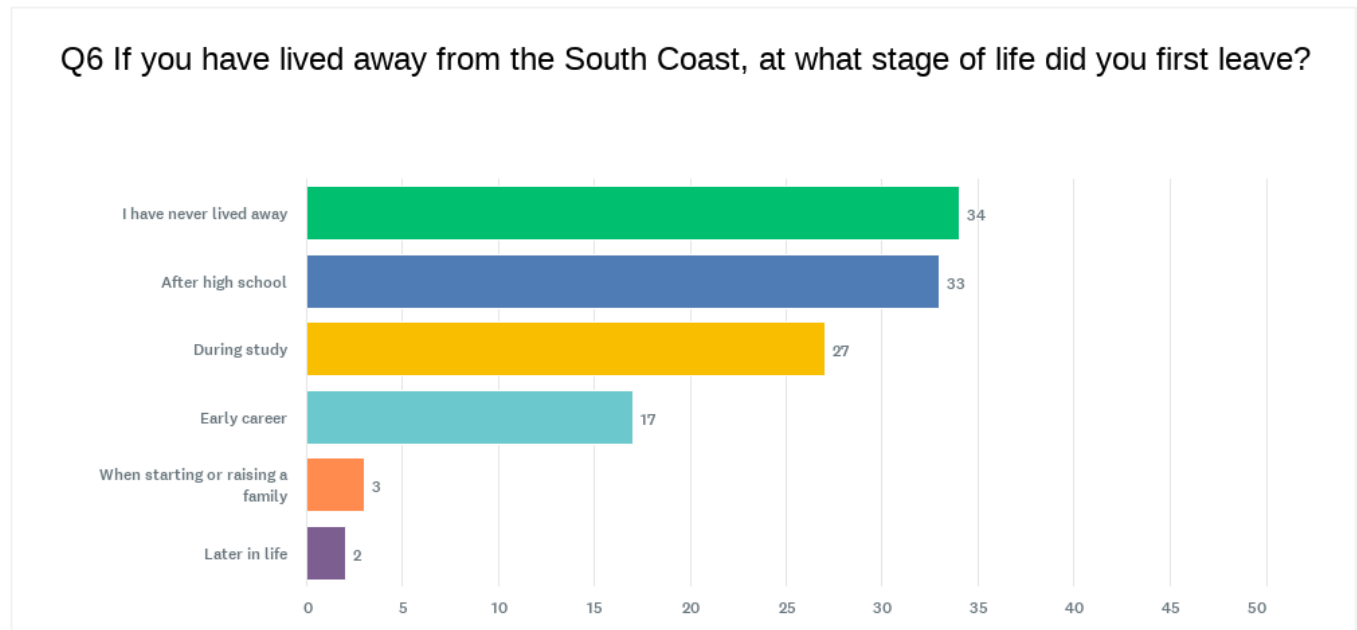
The majority of respondents felt connected to the South Coast, 50 were very connected and 47 were somewhat connected. There were 19 respondents who indicated that they were not very connected to the South Coast.



Reasons for Leaving

There were 82 respondents who have lived away from the South Coast, and 34 who had never left.

Of those that left, 33 left after high school, 27 left during study, 17 left in their early career, 3 left when starting a family, and 2 left later in life.



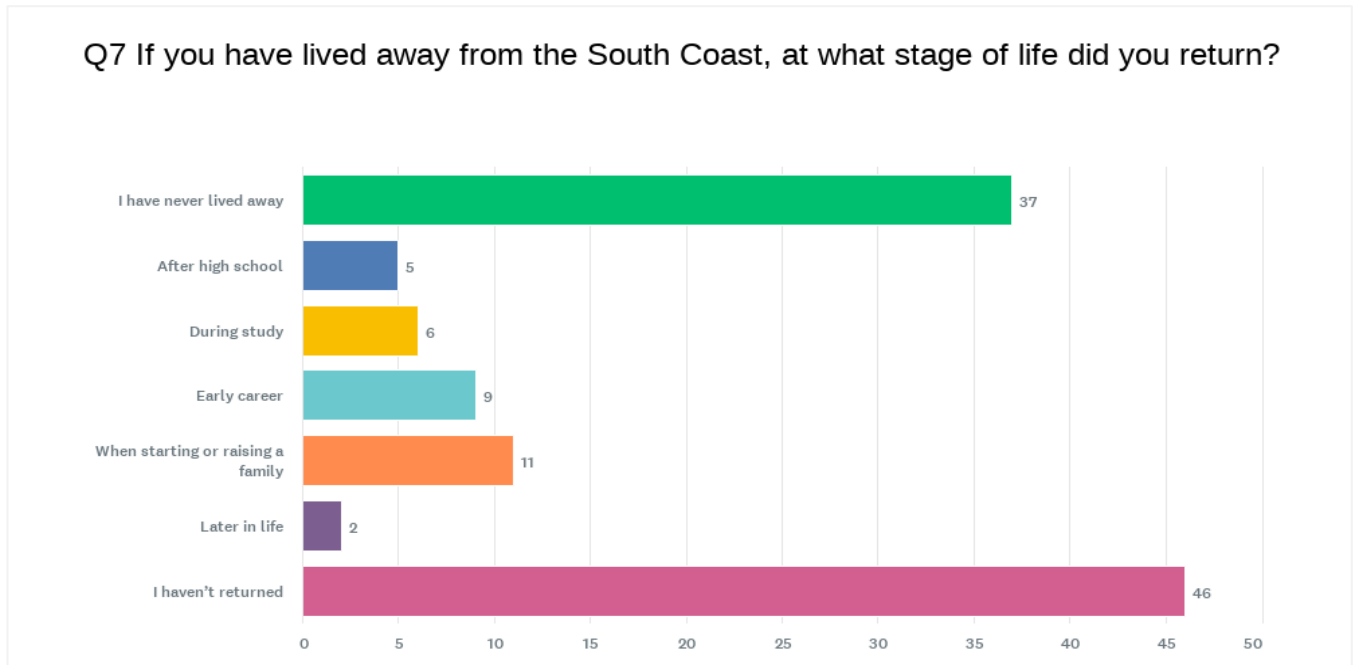
Reasons for leaving are more structurally consistent and less about personal preference. Key themes within the responses around why people left the South Coast include:

- **Education and study pathways** – Limited access to university and diverse training options. Leaving after year 12 is often seen as unavoidable. For example, *There just weren't realistic study options locally after school.*
- **Limited career path employment opportunities** – Lack of professional, specialised or progression-based roles, this seemed particularly acute for early career professionals.
- **Housing availability and affordability** – Rental shortages and purchase prices seen as high relative to local wages.
- **Transport and connectivity** – Distance from Adelaide jobs and services, public transport limitations
- **Desire for broader experience** – Some respondents wanted exposure to city life, networks and opportunities. However, this is often framed as temporary, not a rejection of Victor Harbor and the South Coast region.

Reasons for Staying (or Returning)

There were some inconsistencies with responses compared to the previous question, with 37 respondents indicating they have never lived away from the South Coast (compared with 34 previously).

Of the respondents that have moved away, 46 have not returned. 11 respondents returned when starting or raising a family, 9 returned in their early career, 6 returned during study, 5 returned after high school, and 2 later in life.



Analysis of both closed-ended and open-text responses shows several consistent themes in terms of what keeps people in the region (or draws them back).

- **Lifestyle and natural environment** – Coastal environment, slower pace and access to nature is seen as especially valuable for families and wellbeing. For example, *'The lifestyle and environment are hard to beat, especially once you start thinking about kids'*.
- **Family and social connections** – Proximity to family is a major anchor, along with social familiarity and support networks. For example, *'Being close to family made returning feel like the right decision'*.
- **Community and sense of belonging** – Feeling known, safe and connected. This was particularly strong for those involved in sport or volunteering.
- **Employment that 'fits'** – Those who stayed or returned often had a specific local job, were self-employed / owned a business, or had remote / flexible work.

Structural Pressures and Barriers

The survey results clearly distinguish between individual choice and structural constraint. While some people leave for personal reasons, many described leaving as a practical response to limited options available locally at key life stages (particularly after finishing school and in the early years of building a career).

For clarity, responses can be grouped into two categories:

- **Individual factors (personal circumstances and preferences)**, such as personal ambition, relationships, and the desire for independence or broader experience. These factors are important, but on their own they do not explain the strong patterns in the data (e.g., leaving straight after school, and returning later if jobs and housing are viable).
- **Structural pressures (system-level conditions)**, which shape what options are realistically available locally and can make leaving feel unavoidable.

Key structural pressures raised through the responses include:

- **Geographical concentration of tertiary education:** university and many specialist training options are primarily based in metropolitan areas, making relocation the default pathway for many school leavers.
- **Regional labour markets with limited career progression:** even where entry-level work exists, respondents described fewer professional roles, fewer employers in some fields, and limited opportunities to progress without moving elsewhere.
- **Housing supply and affordability:** limited rental availability and high purchase prices relative to local wages make it difficult for young people and early-career workers to establish themselves or return to the region when they are ready to settle.
- **Transport connectivity to Adelaide:** distance and limited public transport can restrict access to study, training, specialist services, and employment opportunities, increasing the time and cost burden of 'staying local'.
- **Cost of living relative to local wages:** when everyday costs and housing costs rise faster than local earning capacity, it reduces the feasibility of remaining in (or moving back to) the region without secure, well-paid work or additional support.

Overall, respondents framed these as system-level issues that shape life outcomes over time. Many also noted that they are not matters Council can resolve alone. However, they are areas where Council can influence local conditions through planning and place-making, and advocate for investment and service improvements with education providers, industry, and other levels of government.



High School Students Forum – 3 March 2026

A School Students Forum was held on Tuesday, 3 March 2026 with participation from students representing Victor Harbor High School, Investigator College, and Encounter Lutheran College. The forum provided an opportunity to hear directly from young people about their aspirations, concerns, and ideas for the future of Victor Harbor and the South Coast.

A total of **71 students** participated in this forum. Student feedback highlighted strong attachment to the region and a clear appreciation for its lifestyle, natural environment, and sense of community. However, many students also expressed concern about having to leave the region in order to access university, training, employment, entertainment, and broader life opportunities.

Young people's future plans are strongly influenced by access to education, employment pathways, and financial security. Over half intend to pursue university, most commonly in Adelaide, although many indicated they would prefer to remain locally if viable study and career options were available. Financial pressure is a major barrier, with affordability influencing housing, education, and independence decisions.

Interactive polling reinforced concerns about long-term retention. Most participants were uncertain about staying in the region, with only a very small proportion expressing firm intentions to remain. Perceptions of limited job diversity, unclear education pathways, and inadequate transport connectivity contribute to expectations of leaving. Sentiment toward the region was mixed, with many describing it as lacking activity and vibrancy, while positive views centred on natural assets and community connections. Social belonging is strongest through friendships, school environments, and sporting or community groups.

Community asset mapping identified 143 assets across 55 locations. Recreation spaces, parks, and natural environments are viewed as important strengths that support activity and connection. In contrast, public spaces, services, and education settings show the greatest need for improvement, with many perceived as under-activated or difficult to access. Commercial precincts are recognised as functional but lack youth-oriented identity and informal social spaces.

Values Walk discussions reinforced these findings, highlighting limited local career pathways, housing affordability challenges, transport barriers, and a lack of youth-focused amenities. Young people expressed a strong preference for informal gathering spaces over structured programs and emphasised the importance of visible influence in decision-making.

Overall, participants demonstrated strong interest in contributing to their community, particularly where engagement methods are accessible and outcomes are visible.

Five year future plans

Over half the respondents see themselves at university, indicating strong educational aspirations among Victor Harbor youth.

Theme	Mentions
University/Further Study	30 (51%)
Working/Employment	19 (32%)
Travelling	9 (15%)
Teaching	7 (12%)
Physio/Allied Health	3
Childcare	3

Where they plan to live in 5 years

Adelaide is the #1 destination (likely for university access), but 25% would like to stay local if opportunities allowed.

Location	Mentions
Adelaide	22 (37%)
Victor Harbor/Home	15 (25%)
Overseas/Another Country	7
Melbourne	6
Brisbane/QLD	4

What they need to succeed

Financial concerns dominate – over half mentioned needing money. This highlights the importance of affordable pathways and financial support for young people.

Need	Mentions
Money/Financial Support	33 (56%)
University/Education Access	17
Job/Work	16
Housing/Place to Live	9
Finish School/Year 12	7
Good Grades/ATAR	5

How they want to engage

Students prefer anonymous engagement methods. Several spontaneously mentioned wanting better transport to Adelaide – a recurring theme showing infrastructure concerns.

Method	Mentions
Forums/Community Events	9
Surveys (Anonymous)	8
Better Transport (unsolicited!)	5
Online Platforms	4
Vote/Petition	3

Perceptions of Victor Harbor

Approximately 50–55 young people participated in the quiz, which explored perceptions of living locally, housing, employment, education pathways, and social connection.

Living Intentions and Youth Retention

Responses indicate significant uncertainty about remaining in the region long term.

- 43% said their decision to stay depends on future changes
- 49% indicated they are unlikely to remain
- 2% expressed a firm intention to stay

Employment and Career Perceptions

Perceptions of local job opportunities were predominantly negative.

- 60% believe employment opportunities are inadequate

- 7% believe there are sufficient opportunities

When identifying local job options, participants most frequently mentioned entry-level service roles such as fast food and retail, with limited references to professional or career-oriented pathways.

Education and Training Pathway Clarity

Most participants reported uncertainty about their future study or training direction.

- 78% lack clear understanding of their pathway
- 38% indicated they do not know their next steps
- 16% feel confident in their plans

Perceptions of the Local Area

Descriptive responses were largely negative. Frequently used terms included:

- “Old” (35 mentions)
- “Boring” (31 mentions)
- Other common terms: dead, empty, disconnected

Positive associations were less frequent and primarily related to natural and coastal features.

Social Connection

Young people reported strongest connection through existing peer and school networks.

- Friends: 30%
- School: 29%
- Sports, arts, and community groups: 18%
- Online spaces: 16%

These results suggest social belonging is primarily shaped through established peer environments rather than broader community settings.

Values Walk

The themes discussed in this activity have been weighted to reflect their relative prominence in youth discussions during the Values Walk activity. Weightings are based on the frequency of agreement, repetition across prompts, number of participant comments, and the strength of views expressed, providing an indicative measure of which issues were most significant to young people.

Independence and Future Pathways

Most participants felt it is not realistic to build an independent life locally before age 30. Many believed career options are limited, particularly for specialised fields, with only a few identifying viable local professions. Leaving was widely viewed as a normal life stage, though many said they would consider staying if suitable education and employment pathways existed. Most were unsure if they would return later, noting housing affordability, jobs, and lifestyle as key influences.

Housing and Cost of Living

Housing was a major concern. Most felt the housing they would want in five years is either unavailable or unaffordable. While participants valued the region’s environment, many wanted smaller entry-level options such as apartments or units.

Education and Study Opportunities

Local study options were generally seen as limited. Many preferred face-to-face learning and were



reluctant about online delivery. Some expressed interest in local higher education if relevant courses and practical components were available, while others valued studying elsewhere for broader experience.

Lifestyle and Amenity Gaps

Almost all participants agreed there is not enough to do locally. Sporting facilities were recognised positively, but there was strong preference for more informal gathering spaces rather than structured programs.

Transport and Accessibility

Transport was consistently identified as a barrier, with participants noting difficulty moving around the region and calling for improved bus and train services.

Youth Voice and Decision-Making

Most felt community decision-making reflects older generations and that youth input rarely leads to visible action. Suggested improvements included youth representation, clearer communication channels with council, and visible follow-through on ideas.

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Listening Posts - Responses and Feedback

Listening posts were held at Victor Central (5 February and 10 February 2026) and Encounter Lutheran College's Night on the Green (20 February 2026) to provide informal opportunities for community members to learn about the project and share their views.

These interactions provided useful additional insight from community members who may not otherwise engage through formal surveys or workshops. Feedback gathered through the listening posts broadly reinforced the themes emerging from the broader survey, particularly in relation to housing affordability, transport, youth opportunities, service access, and the desire to protect what people value most about the region as it grows.

The listening post format also highlighted the value of meeting people in existing community settings, where conversations were often practical, place-based, and grounded in everyday lived experience.

Key Insights from Listening Posts

- Informal engagement generally reinforced the priorities emerging through the survey rather than introducing entirely separate issues.
- Community members often framed challenges in practical terms, focusing on day-to-day access to housing, services, transport, and opportunities for younger people.
- The listening posts confirmed strong community interest in the project and support for planning ahead rather than responding only after issues intensify.



Stakeholder Reference Group Discussion – 25 March 2026

The Future Ready Stakeholder Reference Group met on Wednesday, 25 March 2026 to discuss the key themes of the engagement. The following summarises the discussion at this meeting:

Discussion around engagement findings

- **Night-Time Economy:**
 - Perception of limited evening activities; transport suggested as the primary barrier, not business willingness to provide opportunities.
 - Suggestion: Advocate for expanded small bar licensing to foster nightlife.
 - **Housing and Accommodation:**
 - Acute shortage and high cost of housing for students, workers, and new residents.
 - Example: International students interested in Victor Harbor but deterred by lack of accommodation and support services.
 - **Transport:**
 - Limited public transport restricts youth mobility and nightlife participation.
 - **University Partnerships:**
 - Universities recognise the need for blended and flexible learning, with practical components requiring travel. There is interest from tertiary institutions for deeper regional engagement.
 - Schools collect data on graduate destinations but lack systematic follow-up.
 - Suggestion: Aggregate data across schools to build a business case for new university or TAFE courses.
 - **Study Hub:**
 - Currently focused on local students; opportunity to expand support for incoming and international students.
 - While the Study Hub has exceeded registration targets, there is low awareness among school students; need for better promotion and potential for exploring opportunities to provide English language courses as required by some visa conditions to better support international workers.
 - **Trades and Vocational Education:**
 - Strong local participation in trades, but training often requires travel to Adelaide or Mount Barker.
 - Suggestion: Expand local TAFE offerings and create boutique apprenticeship experiences.
 - **Business - Education Linkages:**
 - Schools have individual relationships with universities and local businesses.
 - Career expos and work experience programs exist, but a centralised register or platform for promoting opportunities or businesses who are willing to support these initiatives is lacking.
 - Example: Local schools career expo praised for connecting students with local employers.
 - **Regional Identity:**
 - Victor Harbor is not yet recognised as an education destination.
 - Need for a cohesive marketing strategy targeting international students, young families, and businesses.
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- Example: International students and families impressed by local lifestyle but unaware of region's opportunities.

Challenges and considerations

- International students require high-level English proficiency and support services, often only available in Adelaide.
- Lack of “stepping stone” housing for young people and workers; limited options beyond family homes.
- Need clear conduits and ongoing coordination between schools, businesses, council, and tertiary providers to avoid fragmentation of effort.
- Strategy must articulate benefits for both younger and older populations to secure broad community support.

Example actions considered by Stakeholder Reference Group

- Explore public-private partnerships for student and worker housing (e.g., dedicated student accommodation in the town centre).
 - Encourage temporary options (e.g., homestays with local residents).
 - Lobby for improved public transport and late-night services.
 - Increase visibility of the Study Hub and regional lifestyle benefits.
 - Targeted marketing to international and domestic students for career or study opportunities in Victor Harbor.
 - Develop a register of businesses open to student engagement (work experience, apprenticeships).
 - Facilitate school leadership groups, youth councils, and skills workshops in partnership with council.
 - Expand local vocational offerings in trades, health, agriculture, and hospitality.
 - Foster entrepreneurship and coworking spaces (e.g., McKinlay Street car park development).
 - Promote the region's inclusive, close-knit community as a unique selling point.
 - Engage existing multicultural residents and businesses in strategy development.
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Considerations for Strategy Development

The following considerations have been consolidated from recurring themes identified throughout the report. They are intended to guide development of the South Coast Future Ready Strategy and avoid duplication across topic sections.

- **Focus on foundational enablers of liveability (not just lifestyle outcomes).** While the region performs strongly in lifestyle, environment and social connection, the Strategy should prioritise the underlying systems that enable people to live and work locally over the long term (housing, transport, employment, services and digital connectivity).
 - **Treat housing as critical infrastructure that underpins sustainability.** Position housing affordability, availability and suitability as a core enabling issue linked to workforce attraction, service delivery, community wellbeing and economic resilience.
 - **Actively influence the mix of housing types delivered.** Rebalance supply toward a diverse mix that supports all life stages (e.g., family homes, smaller dwellings, townhouses/units, accessible and multi-generational options, and social/affordable housing) rather than an over-reliance on retirement/over-50s product.
 - **Address seasonal, short-stay and under-utilised housing pressures.** Consider how holiday homes, short-stay accommodation and vacant dwellings affect long-term rental supply and affordability, and identify realistic local roles and advocacy options.
 - **Position transport and connectivity as a key “unlocker” of opportunity.** Strengthen transport and digital connectivity as central considerations given impacts on access to jobs, education, health services and social participation, particularly for people without private vehicles.
 - **Plan for service capacity that matches future population change.** Recognise that health, education and other essential services may be adequate today but require forward planning, workforce alignment and advocacy to meet needs of a growing and ageing population.
 - **Strengthen economic resilience through job diversity and local pathways.** Support a more diverse local economy and clearer links between education, training and local employment opportunities, particularly in sectors aligned with regional strengths and future needs.
 - **Position education and career pathways as central to retention and resilience.** Treat education and workforce development as core enablers of demographic balance and future growth, not as secondary or standalone issues.
 - **Reduce the need for residents to leave the region to access education and career opportunities.** Strengthen local, hybrid and flexible education options so that staying is a viable choice (especially for young people and working-age adults).
 - **Strengthen practical, job-linked training pathways.** Prioritise education and training that leads directly to local employment outcomes (apprenticeships, traineeships, paid placements, work experience, and clear transitions from learning to work).
 - **Support early-career opportunity and progression.** Build conditions for professional roles and career progression locally (not only entry-level or seasonal employment), including through business attraction, enabling infrastructure and partnerships.
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- **Leverage lifestyle and community strengths as an anchor (not a substitute for opportunity).** Protect the natural environment and community character residents value, and use these strengths to attract workers and investment aligned with community expectations.
- **Invest in liveability and cultural vibrancy as retention drivers.** Improve access to evening and after-hours activity as an opportunity for place-making, economic activation and social connection, supporting younger people and working families.
- **Maintain and broaden engagement and belonging through visible pathways.** Build more visible, accessible pathways into leadership and civic participation, and reduce practical barriers to participation (timing, transport and cost).
- **Improve visibility, coordination and confidence in the region's direction.** Clearly articulate long-term priorities, roles and partnerships so residents, businesses and service providers understand how growth will be managed and how they can participate.
- **Clarify Council's role as leader, facilitator and advocate.** Reflect community expectations that Council will convene partners, enable solutions where it can, and advocate on issues beyond its direct control.

Next Steps

This report represents the first phase of engagement for the South Coast Future Ready Strategy and will be used alongside Council's broader research, demographic analysis, strategic planning work, and stakeholder input to inform the next stage of Strategy development.

The next phase of the project will involve further refinement of key issues, testing of potential strategic directions and priority actions, and continued engagement with relevant stakeholders and the community as required. This will assist Council in developing a Strategy that is evidence-based, community-informed, and responsive to the region's long-term opportunities and challenges.

Further updates on the project and opportunities for involvement will be provided through Council's usual communication channels as the Strategy progresses.

Conclusion

In summary, this phase of engagement has provided valuable insights into the region's unique strengths and challenges, highlighting key priorities for the South Coast Future Ready Strategy.

By focusing on interconnected issues such as housing, education, transport, and community vibrancy, Council is well positioned to shape a strategy that supports sustainable growth and enhances liveability for all residents.

Continued collaboration with stakeholders and the community will be essential to ensure the Strategy remains responsive and effective as it evolves.

